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**IN SEARCH OF THE NEOBAROQUE IMAGE**

MA Thesis

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Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor *prof* Jüri Talvet for giving me the opportunity of diving into this anachronistic, to say the least, theme in Estonia, and for encouraging me to continue with it despite the scarcity of materials.

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# Introduction

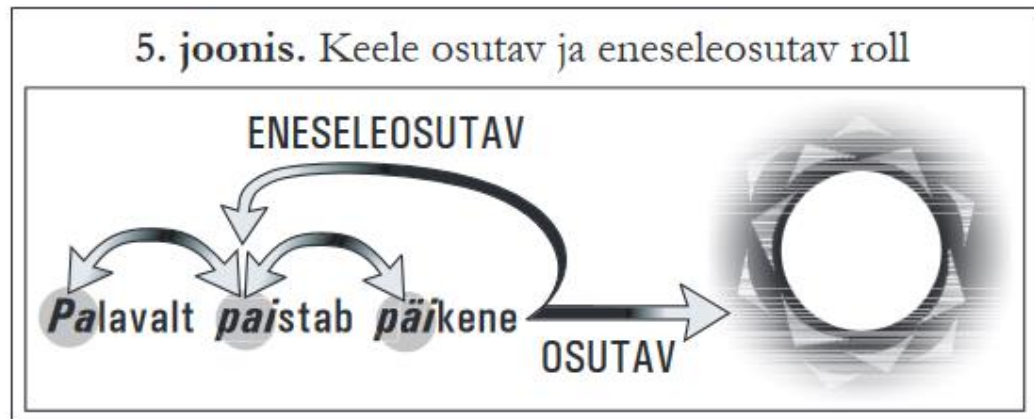
This MA project's aim is to map the possible meanings and applications of the term neobaroque. The work has grown with and out of the author's personal fascination with language and its power to create very specific and unusual feelings of pleasure and pain by simply being language. It is the continuous search for the traits in specific texts for elements that direct attention to the *form* of the text.

The objective of this work is to delineate some main categories of neobaroque poetics on the basis of a fundamental juxtaposition within the "Cuban triumvirate" – three essayists who have developed the ways of thinking about the baroque of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and also written on the theme in their seminal essays, all born in Cuba – Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy. The introduction of these authors and their main theses is presented in the first part of the work. This is followed by an attempt to find and extract some characteristics of the neobaroque image that have been compiled on the basis of the three authors' works and finally to apply them in a reading of Severo Sarduy's novel *Colibrí* (1984).

The main corpus of the texts being interpreted come from the three aforementioned authors. All other textual references are there to create perspective, and when necessary, criticize. This explains the tautology that is apparent in the seminal works, especially Sarduy, as well as in this thesis. And that by design. I have not limited the tautology of my text. That allows for an even further interpretation of these texts that is already interpretation to the power of  $n$  (interpretation<sup>n</sup>).

This method is the direct consequence of the main hypothesis and the productive force behind this work – *the usage of certain literary devices carries a specific meaning in itself, the usage of literary devices is self-referential*. The discourse of the self-referentiality of language is widely present in Estonia. There is the well-known textbook *Poeetika* (Poeetika, 2003) by Arne Merilai, Anneli Saro and Epp Annus, which is used in both universities as well as high schools. The image that is the master trope for the idea

of self-referentiality in Estonia, is as follows, by Arne Merilai (an in-depth scientific treatment of the self-referentiality of language can be found in prof. Merilai's *Pragmapoeetika* (Pragmapoetics, 2003):



(From *Poetics* 2003: 23)

The most important roles that are present in language are the referentiality (*osutav*) and the self-referentiality (*eneseleosutav*). Thus, language can denominate and, at the same time refer to the fact that it is denominating, it is artifice. Keeping that in mind, another aim of this work, with the help of the neobaroque poetics, is to typologize the usage of certain poetic processes into an operant poetics and show that the use of a specific linguistic or literary device can in turn, be reflected in the structure of the whole work of art. This is not a novel idea, as it was prominently dealt with already in the works of the Russian Formalists. For example, in the 1925 book *Theory of Prose*, Viktor Shklovsky presents the idea of the *progressive construction* of a work of art, which suggests that the formation of specific plots makes use of certain poetic devices, in his example, the repetition (Shklovsky 1990: 22). This idea is developed further into the direction I am focusing on, in the works of Tzvetan Todorov, specifically in *The Poetics of Prose* (1971): "Such studies [by the Russian formalists] have dealt with poetry, and they try to demonstrate the existence of a structure formed by the distribution of certain linguistic elements within a poem. I propose to indicate here, apropos of literary prose, several points where the relationship between language and literature seems particularly noticeable." (Todorov 1977: 20) Todorov's approach in the book is, therefore, strongly

structuralist, which is why only the general idea of the previous statement will be adopted for this work – relationship between language and literature. His contemporary (though born a generation earlier), Roland Barthes, was at the time writing *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973), which already creates a more generalizing background for this idea, focusing on the process of signification, adopting a more post-structuralist approach.

This MA thesis contains a case study of the novel *Colibrí* (1984) by the Cuban author Severo Sarduy as a first endeavour to apply the proposed poetics. Sarduy's writings present an unusual combination of both highly complex form and a content that is secondary to it. *Colibrí*, which, despite having a ludicrous plot of transvestites and male prostitutes in a Latin American jungle, immediately draws the reader's attention to the untraditional form of the text, the overflowing nature of it, and the unusualness of it. Due to this his writings are not the preference of every reader, as they are difficult, confusing, convoluted, controversial – *ergo*, baroque in nature. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin American literary criticism, baroque has become the main term that is used to describe these kinds of texts. Thus, the description, condensation and application of the neobaroque forms the main framework of this thesis.

The ideas that were mostly relevant during the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century form the theoretical background of this thesis. The Estonian academic focus concerning poetics was quite conservative until the 1990s. After the independence from the Soviet Union there was an explosion in the interest in Barthes, Derrida, Deleuze, etc. The investigation of the baroque stems from the same ache as this interest; it just has not been studied in Estonia thus far. Irleamar Chiampi says already in the year 1994 – “But, maybe it would be more correct to say that instead of a “boom”, we have a new “syndrome” of the Baroque (in the beginning of the 20th century the same occurred), very revealing of the malaise and – why not – the pathologies of the modern culture.”<sup>1</sup> (Chiampi 1994: 1) This shows that there is at least a 25-year shift in the relocation of this knowledge, which can be attributed to the fact that many of the central texts on the baroque are either in French,

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<sup>1</sup> “Pero, acaso sea más correcto decir que, en vez de un «boom», tenemos más bien un nuevo «síndrome» del Barroco (a comienzos del siglo XX ocurrió el primero), muy revelador del malestar y —por qué no— de las patologías de la cultura moderna.” (Chiampi 1994: 1) *Here and further on all translations into English by the author – K.L.*

or mostly, in Spanish. Yet these are the seminal sources that are a parallel with poststructuralism, *and* postmodernism. I hope that this introduction will give a retrospect possibility for the Estonian academia to discover the other side of the coin, the Latin American view, and spark many new and interesting dialogues with the ever-so-popular French. This thesis aims to be an introductory excursion from the Estonian point of view, as the Latin-American neobaroque movement has not been thoroughly investigated here. That is the reason why this work is written in English. It draws from both Spanish and English sources and is a small summary of the developments of the baroque literary theory in the Hispano-American community in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet it also invites further developments concerning the baroque poetics from the Estonian academia.

Frequently used terms that should be kept in mind during the reading:

Both *neobaroque* and *baroque* are used to mark the resurgences of the baroque in the 20th century. When referring to the 17th century baroque, the phrase *historical baroque* will be used. There is a slight differentiation between the usage of the terms neobaroque and baroque, the latter to mostly denominate the pre-neobaroque developments of the century, including Lezama Lima and Carpentier, and the former to denominate the developments starting with Sarduy.

*Proliferation*: rapid increase in the number or amount of something. This phenomenon can take different names in the current work, an explosion, *objet (a)*, *horror vacui*.

*Fractalesque*: a *fractal* is a mathematical function, each part of which mimics the mother function, thus creating a succession of the same function recurring at increasingly smaller (and bigger) scales, in that, it creates a pattern. This term has been used to describe images, fragments and text, which are contained in each other and have a similar structure.

*Retombée*: achronic, isomorphic or noncontinuous causality, or the consequence of something that has not yet been produced, similar to something that does not exist yet <sup>2</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 1196).

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<sup>2</sup> “causalidad acrónica, isomorfía o no contigua, o, consecuencia de algo que aún no se ha producido, parecido con algo que aún no existe.” (Sarduy 1999: 1196)

# 1. On the Theory of the Baroque and the Neobaroque in Latin America

The theme of baroque aesthetics rose to the forefront in critical discourse already in the end of the 19th and in the beginning of the 20th century, evolving into a multi-faceted theory, more than there has ever been in the Spanish language scholarly practice. Yet, Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup point out: “The Baroque is still relatively underappreciated in the Anglo-American critical tradition...” (Zamora & Kaup 2010: 17). The fact that this statement dates from 2010 is surprising. The baroque is one of the crucial veins of the Latin American literary theory nowadays, an undercurrent for all other theorizations and literary movements, for example the *modernismo*, the *vanguardismo*, and even the *new novel* and *magical realism*. Baroque has been called the *master trope of the Americas* (Ayala 2012: 35). None of the aforementioned literary movements should be investigated without keeping in mind the baroque discourse in Latin America.

First let there be a brief overview of the history of theoretical thinking on the baroque that has originated from Latin America. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century Latin-American scholars have criticized the narrow mode of discussions on the subject in Europe (*viz* the comment of Zamora and Kaup) and in doing so have developed an extensive theory. Many of those scholars would actually consider the baroque to be reserved solely for the New World (Salgado 1999: 2). Keeping in mind the meaning of it in the Old World, the baroque in the New World has thrived and continues to produce critical discussions concerning the art, and the lives, for that matter, of the Americans. It seems to be uniquely compatible with the Latin American culture of hybridity, lusciousness and *mestizaje*<sup>3</sup>. Thus speaking about Latin American or Hispano-American baroque something more than an exclusively European style will be discussed. Salgado paraphrases Lezama Lima: “To cross from the European Baroque into the Latin American Neo-Baroque is to move from a hegemonic,

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<sup>3</sup> Mezcla de culturas distintas, que da origen a una nueva. (Mixture of different cultures that produces a new culture) *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*



diffusionist, and acculturating conception of the term to an emancipating, autochthonous, and transculturating one.” (Salgado 1999: 2). This route, taken by Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima among others, is strongly connected to the postcolonial agenda, which is why in this work those two authors, Carpentier more and Lezama Lima less, have been used as an opposition to Sarduy, as the aim and necessary constraint of the thesis is to create an operant poetics that would be derived solely from the poetics and view on poetics of these writers and not have a strong socio-political background.

The theoretical *belle époque* of the baroque discussions developed between the years of 1950 to 1980 in Latin America. Nevertheless, already in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish philologist Marcelino Menendez y Pelayo started to study the colonial Hispano-American baroque poetry and in the year 1911, the monumental work *Historia de la poesía hispano-americana* was published. There, Menendez y Pelayo tries to show how Latin American baroque is merely a dialect of the flourishing Spanish colonial culture and largely inspired by the *decadent* Cordoban Baroque poet don Luis de Góngora (See Carpentier’s commentary in chapter 1.1).

Here the first problem of the work at hand is presented: the problem of belonging. To whom does baroque belong? Throughout the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century it has become a tool of the postcolonial discourse – who was first to use it, who copied it from the other, who used it better, who usurped it and who used it as a tool to overthrow the cultural hegemony. Menendez y Pelayo does it and so do both Carpentier and Lezama Lima, to an extent, when they decide to emphasize the cultural specificity of baroque. This is still a point that keeps starting academic discussions, arguments, debates, and even bitter fights. In general, this has resulted in healthy and a very productive opposition, but also in remarks as vulgar as – *the baroque was invented in Spain but the Latin Americans have used it much better*. As Zamora and Kaup also point out in the introduction of their comprehensive collection of texts *Baroque New Worlds: Representation, Transculturation, Counterconquest* (2010), Lezama Lima himself appropriated baroque for the New World and made as generalizing statements as the ones he himself mocks. (Zamora & Kaup 2010: 1).

Allen Young in the captivating article *Un neobarroco español*, that was published in 2013

in the Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies, asks, is a Spanish Neobaroque possible? And states that in theory, yes, it is. It would not be difficult to find texts that boast of a taste for the excessive, a marked auto-referentiality, a tendency towards fragmentation, an emphasis on the artifice or the surface, a camp sensibility, and above all, the willingness to convert a most rancid tradition into a throbbing sign of modernity. (Young 2013: 1) Unfortunately, the answer will not be that simple. First, many implications of this appropriation must be discussed: taking into account that there is also the tendency to appropriate the neobaroque solely for the Americas as in “doing it better than the Spanish did”, is it even possible to translate the novels, if the basis of the poetics is ideological? “To speak of the possibility [of a Spanish baroque] – the legitimacy of one – implies entering a much more ample discussion over the cultural production on the one and the other side of the Atlantic, and the investigation of that in a university setting. It implies a study of the intellectual interexchange routes which unite not only the distinct geographic spaces, but also, and above all, different fields of study.”<sup>4</sup> (Young 2013: 1). In this thesis, I will not delve into the possibilities of applying the emerging poetics to the Estonian or a wider European context, though it would be a very interesting route of investigation. Unfortunately, this kind of investigation would surpass the framework of a MA thesis. I postulate that when the neobaroque poetics is generalized in a purely (post-)structuralist way, à la Sarduy, it might be a very fruitful move also on a larger scale.

In the 1940s, the Americans Alfonso Reyes Pedro Henriques Ureña and Mariano Picón Salas tried to contend with Menendez y Pelayo’s belittling view of the Latin American letters. Although they aspired to find a voice and they succeeded in bringing new aspects into the discourse – such as *creolization* and *mestizaje* – the result of these theoreticians was still a pessimistic view of the Latin American baroque as a somewhat incomplete phenomenon that endorsed the creation of social castes and social isolation in the Americas. (Salgado 1999: 4)

It is not until the 60s that the Latin American baroque theory can claim its position on the

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<sup>4</sup> “Pero hablar de la posibilidad–la legitimidad–de ese salto implica entrar en una discusión mucho más amplia sobre la producción cultural a un lado y otro del Atlántico, y su estudio en el ámbito universitario. Implica un examen de las rutas de intercambio intelectual que unen no sólo distintos espacios geográficos, sino también, y sobre todo, distintos campos académicos.” (Young 2013: 1)

world stage when the three Cuban authors – José Lezama Lima, Alejo Carpentier and Severo Sarduy – start developing their positive theory of Latin American baroque. In their works it becomes a hybrid, independent phenomenon that is only partially dependent (yet still is dependent) of the European templates, but which is undeniably characteristic of Latin America (Salgado 1999: 3–5). A change in the discussion is the inversion of the colonial discourse: the modern Baroque literature in Europe was only feasible as a result of the *conquista* of the Americas.

The Italian semiotic Omar Calabrese (*L'età neobarocca* 1987) has a very rational, albeit a slightly forced proposition that will also present a possible solution to the problem of *belonging* presented earlier: it is effective to differ between both classicism and baroque as a historicist style and an *aire del tiempo*, a constant of the human mind, an *espíritu* that can be used to analyse all representations of the human culture. “The “neobaroque” is simply an “aire del tiempo” which invades many of the cultural phenomena of today in all fields of knowledge, introducing them all to one another, and which differentiates them from a more or less distant recent future and its cultural phenomena.”<sup>5</sup> (Calabrese 1999: 12). This might explain why the Baroque revival artefacts of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century have little to do with the neobaroque in (Latin American) literature. The writers who have been attributed baroque expression are the following: Miguel Angel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Severo Sarduy, Luis Rafael Sánchez, Carlos Fuentes, Fernando del Paso, Carlos Germán Belli, Haroldo de Campos (Chiampi 1994: 4); Augusto Roa Bastos, Octavio Paz, Édouard Glissant (Chiampi 2010: 508); in different sources the following have also been mentioned – Julio Cortázar, Salvador Elizondo, José Donoso, Oscar Massotta, Pablo Neruda, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Gabriel García Márquez, and Mario Vargas Llosa.

As can be seen in the list, which is by no means comprehensive, it consists of Latin American household names, all men, from different eras, literary movements and backgrounds. Yet the one thing that connects all of these is an undercurrent of the

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<sup>5</sup> “El “neobarroco” es simplemente un “aire del tiempo” que invade muchos fenómenos culturales de hoy en todos los campos del saber, haciéndolos familiares unos a los otros y que, al mismo tiempo, los diferencia de todos los otros fenómenos culturales de un pasado más o menos reciente,” (Calabrese 1999: 12).

baroque. This list will not be investigated nor revised in the current thesis, with the exception of Lezama Lima, Carpentier and Sarduy, who have all personally stressed the baroque influence in their works.

Though it seems that baroque expression favours men and Latin Americans, it would be wrong to take that as the proof of Latin American men being the only ones able to express themselves in a baroque fashion. It just requires us to look into the reasons of why baroque becomes so all-encompassingly important in Latin America. This is what the following three sub-chapters deal with – all three authors have taken the baroque as their main research area. Yet it is possible to observe a considerable logical development from postcolonial treatment to a more post-structural treatment of the baroque, with Carpentier using more of a post-colonialist rhetoric, Lezama Lima less, and Sarduy not using it almost at all.

### **1.1. Alejo Carpentier**

Alejo Carpentier was born in the year 1904 in Cuba. As the oldest of the three, he is the only one to suffer from Gerardo Machado's dictatorship (1925–1933) directly due to being incarcerated for Communist tendencies. As many others, he welcomed the Castro revolution with open arms. Yet he is the only one who stays devout to the regime until the day of his death. José Lezama Lima, although he stayed in Cuba, was ostracized and criticized due to his laxity towards the system, and Severo Sarduy, intentionally or not, became a dissident.

The years 1928 to 1939 Carpentier spent in Paris and took part in the surrealist movement of André Breton. He left the movement thoroughly disillusioned, and found it necessary to define the differences between the European and the American marvellous. This critique is found in the prologue of the novel *The Kingdom of This World* (1949). Carpentier strongly states that the marvellous can only surge in places that have the necessary substrate for the miracle to happen, such as Latin America: "The result of attempting to arouse the marvellous at all costs is that the thaumaturges become bureaucrats. Invoked by means of clichéd formulas that turn certain paintings into a

monotonous mess of drooping clocks, seamstresses' dummies, or vague phallic monuments, the marvellous is stuck in umbrellas, or lobsters, or sewing machines, or wherever, on an operating table, in a sad room, in a stony desert. Miguel de Unamuno said that memorizing rule books indicated a poverty of imagination.”<sup>6</sup> (Carpentier 1997: 504–505)

Here many of the European surrealists are openly criticized – Dali for the clocks, umbrellas, sewing machines, and the lobster, Breton and Man Ray for the mannequins, the general way the Surrealists revered Comte de Lautréamont and his famous phrase “beautiful as the chance meeting on a dissecting table of a sewing machine and an umbrella”. Carpentier maintains that the surrealists try to evoke the marvellous, but in the state of blasé disbelief this is impossible, it is “but a literary trick and a boring one at that for having been prolonged” (Carpentier 1997: 506). The first demand of the marvellous real or magical realism is thus faith in the possibility of a miracle, being open to something unexpected happening.

Carpentier develops this critique further in the 1975 speech held in Caracas with which the aforementioned prologue is to become one of the flagship texts in the discourse of the marvellous real. In *Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso*, curiously, he starts with an excursion into the existing definitions of the word ‘baroque’. I say curiously, because both Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy as well have touched upon this point in the beginning of their central texts. In each of the following chapters, you will find a similar excursion into the terminological and etymological investigations of the authors, as these are concentrated examples of their specific approach to the baroque and can be used to gauge their *attitudes* towards it.

Carpentier’s apology starts on a traditional note. He criticizes the definitions given by major encyclopaedias and dictionaries and concludes that they are all insufficient. The *Petit Larousse* quotes Churriguera as the main example of the baroque and this is

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<sup>6</sup> “Pero, a fuerza de querer suscitar lo maravilloso a todo trance, los taumaturgos se hacen burócratas. Invocado por medio de fórmulas consabidas que hacen de ciertas pinturas un monótono baratillo de relojes amelochoados, de maniqués de costura, de vagos monumentos fálicos, lo maravilloso se queda en paraguas o langosta o máquina de coser, o lo que sea, sobre una mesa de disección, en el interior de un cuarto triste, en un desierto de rocas.” (Carpentier 1997: 504-505)

unacceptable for Carpentier, as the baroque is “something multiple, diverse, enormous, which far surpasses the work of a single architect or a single Baroque artist,”<sup>7</sup> (Carpentier 1990: 333). He is already preparing the stage for his following statement that the baroque is actually an all-encompassing phenomenon, a constant of the human existence. Then he politely disparages the *Real Academia Española* for a lacking definition. Which is followed by an unnamed thesaurus that offers a constellation of words that may convey a negative connotation, and have done so, in many a dissertation on the baroque since the end of the historical baroque era. Here the opinion of Carpentier regarding the baroque can be most valuably assessed, as he rejects the terms overloaded (*recargado*), mannered (*amanerado*), Culteranist (*culterano*), Conseptist (*conseptista*), churrigueresque (*churrigueresco*) and then humorously exclaims that he cannot continue any more – decadent (*decadente*) (*ibid.*).

“Every time I hear the word *decadent* being spoken I go into a silent state of fury, because this thing of decadence and that an art can be decadent has been systematically applied to a multitude of artistic manifestations that, far from demarcating a decadence, demarcate the peaks of the culture”<sup>8</sup> (Carpentier 1990: 334)

At the same time, Carpentier is disappointed to find the term Gongorean (*gongorino*) in the thesaurus, exclaiming, “as if it were a shame to be Gongorean” (Carpentier: 334). This constellation of terms and Carpentier’s attitudes towards those give a sharp overview of his position – the baroque as a term, as a movement should be freed from the negative connotations that have been attached to it since the end of the historical Baroque era, it should be revived as an independent, and in Carpentier’s case, a general characteristic of Latin American literature. This, of course, is an ideological move by Carpentier to use the baroque as a tool of counter-colonization. This kind of an exposition is aimed to empower the periphery, to reclaim the Latin American land, to shed the demeaning mark of colonization and to reaffirm an independent intellectual content of the continent.

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<sup>7</sup> “el barroco es algo múltiple, diverso, enorme, que rebasa la obra de un solo arquitecto o un solo artista barroco.” (Carpentier 1990: 333)

<sup>8</sup> “Cada vez que oigo hablar de arte “decadente” me pongo en un estado de furia sorda, porque esto de la decadencia y de que un arte sea decadente se ha aplicado sistemáticamente a una multitud de manifestaciones artísticas que, lejos de marcar una decadencia, marcan las cumbres de una cultura.” (Carpentier 1990: 334)

However, Carpentier does not completely reject the undercurrent of the historical Baroque, as he keeps Gongora on a pedestal. Quite curiously, Carpentier concludes, the baroque was not invented in the 17th century, but has always existed (Carpentier: 336). In *The Baroque and the Marvelous Real* (*Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso*) he concludes that until now the clear defining of baroque as a style has not been successful, nor would it be fruitful to try and define it in accordance to a historical period. He agrees in that with Eugenio d'Ors, a beginning-of-the-20<sup>th</sup>-century Catalan art historian, who proposes a creative urge, a pulse in the baroque, which returns cyclically to different manifestations of art and that it is more a spirit, like the spirit of imperialism. Baroque is a constant of the human mind. (Carpentier 1990: 334–335) The aim of Carpentier is to show that baroque is a way of human reasoning that has existed during the whole Modernity. Contrary to the historical styles of Gothicism or Romanticism, Baroque did not remain a mere reflection of the era (Carpentier 1990: 337). Although seemingly similar to Omar Calabrese's postulations who also aims to use the neobaroque as a general characteristic, these are on further examination inverted. While Calabrese stresses that the neobaroque has the face of the era it appears in, Carpentier suggests the baroque is an archetypal instinct of the human being that just happened to flourish in the Americas, and, in the 16th century Europe. This results in an even stranger contradiction in his works, as they effectively try to appropriate the baroque for the Americas.

In continuation, Carpentier opposes the baroque to Classicism. In classicism, the empty space between the elements is as important as the elements themselves. Baroque on the other hand is a style that is characterized by a *horror vacui* – a horror of the vacuum, of empty, bare surfaces, the harmony of linear geometry. Baroque ornaments burst out of the given frame; every ornament is an independent focus containing expansive energy (Carpentier 1990: 338). This is the structural characteristic of baroque that all three Cuban theorists touch upon – the expansive energy of the ornament and the *horror vacui*, but Carpentier does not elaborate in his speech any further as to why it is so.

The point about the nature of the baroque Carpentier wants to offer is – America, the continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, of *mestizaje* has always been baroque (Popol Vuh, the books of Chilam Balam, Aztec, Incan and Mayan cultures etc.)

“And why is it that Latin America is baroque’s preferred land? Because all the symbiosis, all the *mestizaje* engenders the baroque. The American baroque increases with the creolization, with the sense of the Creole, with the consciousness that the American man attains, be it the son of a white man from Europe, a son of a black African, be it the son of an Indian born on the continent /---/ the consciousness of being something else, of being a something new, being of a symbiosis, being a Creole, and the Creole spirit is a baroque spirit.”<sup>9</sup> (Carpentier 1990: 347)

With this poetic statement, Carpentier has made the same mistake he so ridiculed previously when talking about decadence. If all *mestizaje* is baroque, then there is very little in the Latin American letters and the whole continent, in the world, that is not—which defeats Carpentier’s own aim of proving baroque is a specifically American phenomenon. This also renders a poetics unnecessary. This statement is induced by the wish to show that the American baroque is, in essence, *better* than the European baroque, as it arrived in America and *naturally* grew to be this magnitude due to the already baroque nature of the *nature* of Latin America. Moreover, to make peace with the horrors of the Conquista, Carpentier defines the marvellous as something that is admirable because it is beautiful *and* because it is ugly, deformed, terrible. Everything unheard of is marvellous. So even the Conquista is baroque. Unfortunately, this totalizing approach to the definition of the baroque makes it quite difficult, if not virtually impossible to delineate a specifically neobaroque aesthetic which is why none of the traits of the poetics that has been established in this thesis have been directly derived from Carpentier. Though many of his examples are invaluable and will be used in the exposition, Carpentier’s baroque is too ideologically driven to serve as a basis for a description of the neobaroque *poiesis*.

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<sup>9</sup> “¿Y por qué es América Latina la tierra de elección del barroco? Porque toda simbiosis, todo mestizaje, engendra un barroquismo. El barroquismo americano se acrece con la criolledad, con el sentido del criollo, con la conciencia que cobra el hombre americano, sea hijo de blanco venido de Europa, sea hijo de negro africano, sea hijo de indio nacido en el continente - /---/ la conciencia de ser otra cosa, de ser una cosa nueva, de ser una simbiosis, de ser un criollo; y el espíritu criollo de por sí es un espíritu barroco.” (Carpentier 1990: 347)



## 1.2 José Lezama Lima

One of the most important Cuban intellectuals and writers of the 20th century, José Lezama Lima was born in 1910 in Havana and only left the island for two short visits to Jamaica and Mexico. He lived a quiet life, first with his mother until she died in 1964 and after that married a family friend who cared for him until his death in 1976. This seemingly simple life is really a façade for a deeply intellectual one. His writings reveal a highly sophisticated level of expertise in many areas of world culture. His seminal novel *Paradiso* (1966) presents an intricate web of references to European, American and Asian authors, historical periods and figures, not to mention the linguistic aspects of the novel that take inspiration from the threefold origins of Cuba's population (indigenous, European and Asian), in addition to his own imagination. The result is one of the most influential texts of the 20th century in the Americas.

He read voraciously and wrote poetry and prose, considered by many the epitome of the American baroque of the 20th century. During his life, five poetry collections *Muerte de Narciso* (1937), *Enemigo rumor* (1941), *Aventuras sigilosas* (1945), *La fijeza* (1949), and *Dador* (1960) were published, in addition to several volumes of essays. Lezama Lima's style is famously difficult, fragmentary and proliferating. This is because Lezama Lima during his life conceived and developed what he called a *sistema poético del mundo* – a poetic system of the world, which will be discussed further in this chapter. It is not a philosophy *per se*, but rather a collection of quotes and ideas (ex. Giambattista Vico, Pascal), that has been presented in a very baroque style in all of his writings.

As a continuation of the last chapter, where the all-inclusiveness of Carpentier's baroque treatment was criticized, let there be a short excursion to the way Lezama Lima has criticized the usage of the term. In his essay *La curiosidad barroca* the problem presented is the overwhelming amplitude with which the world literary criticism has used the term *baroque*. Like Carpentier, Lezama Lima also points out that the word *baroque* had acquired a strongly negative connotation by the end of the historical Baroque movement, but has since become a fashion statement: "The word Baroque was followed by peremptory negations, decadent and mortifying allusions. When, in the course of this [the 19th] century, the term's fortunes changed and it came to be valued as the dominant

artistic style over two centuries, reappearing in different countries and epochs as a new temptation and an unfamiliar challenge, its definition grew so vast that it encompassed Loyola's *Excercises*, the paintings of Rembrandt and El Greco, Rubens's feasts, Philippe de Champaigne's asceticism, Bach's art of the fugue, a cold Baroque as well as an ebullient Baroque, Leibniz's mathematics, the ethics of Spinoza – there was even a critic who, outdoing himself in the art of generalization, claimed that the earth is classical and the the sea is Baroque.” (Lezama Lima 2010: 213). He is thus opposing Carpentier in this, trying to delineate the baroque in a specific manner, yet he never leaves the ideological dominant behind.

Let it be emphasized that Lezama Lima did not intend to write a *theory*, but has specifically underlined the essayistic nature of his texts. Nevertheless, the body of works of his creates a unique possibility of application, as the style of both the “theoretic” as well as the “fictional” texts is infallibly Baroque in both cases, there is almost no differentiation as to the usage of imagery. He famously starts the seminal collection *La expresión americana* with the following: “Only the difficult is stimulating, only the resistance that challenges us is capable of displeasing us, provoking us, and maintaining our potential of knowledge,”<sup>10</sup> (Lezama Lima 2005: 728). He creates a *total* body of work which is *self-referential*, which includes the poetry, the essays, the novel, the articles and reviews published in periodicals – it is thoroughly baroque and the form of each text is undeniably Lezamian. In this, he differs slightly from Sarduy and Carpentier, whose essays and articles *are* difficult and baroque in their essence, yet there is still a differentiation of style that takes into account the specific reader. For example, Sarduy's essay *The Baroque and the Neobaroque* is written in a concise academic style that can be easily understood today as well. Lezama Lima on the other hand never compromises the baroque poetics of his texts, regardless of the audience of the text.

Lezama Lima's poetic system of the world, therefore, “provides a way of conceiving the world from or through aesthetics, more specifically, through poetry, the image, the metaphor.”<sup>11</sup> (Garganigo et al 1997: 581). This is a departure from the western rationality,

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<sup>10</sup> “Sólo lo difícil es estimulante, sólo la resistencia que nos reta es capaz de enarcar, suscitar y mantener nuestra potencia de conocimiento,” (Lezama Lima 2005: 728)

<sup>11</sup> “provee una manera de concebir el mundo desde o a través de la estética, en concreto, desde la poesía,

which proposes knowledge as either empirical or *a priori*. Lezama Lima's system stands on a very different rationale, as the *truth-value* is not a necessary factor for a poetic system of the world. It resembles a meticulous constellation of images that above all must be *internalized* in a very different reading – the text must dictate the modality of reading, emphasizing the poetic nature of the text, the art(ifice), where *understanding* is not the main goal, but merely (as the parallel Lacanian philosophy states, unreachable, see chapter 1.4) a possibility. This is certainly not characteristic of the baroque text solely, but of all text. Yet, in the baroque text the artifice, the self-referentiality, the poetics are infinitely more on the forefront. Irlemar Chiampi states of Lezama Lima in contrast to Carpentier in the article *Baroque at the Twilight of Modernity*: “in Lezama, symbolic/diabolic *poiesis* does not communicate any other meaning than the very mechanism of the “unconditioned poetic”” (Chiampi 2010: 514). The baroque text can be appreciated on many different levels, but to look for a finite *meaning* would be more than anything a waste of time and nerves. As was apparent during the historical Baroque and all the more so during the 1970s and 80s for example in Latin America, one of the key elements of reading a baroque text is pleasure, derived from the proliferation of meaning, from the explosion of possibility and the manifolds of possible worlds that result, as well as the form of the text that stands in the forefront.

In the article *El 26 de Julio: Imagen y posibilidad*, published in 1968 as a tribute to the anniversary of Castro's revolution that took place in 1959, Lezama Lima says: “The man is always a prodigy, provided the image penetrates and impulses him. The hypothesis of the image is the possibility.”<sup>12</sup> (Lezama Lima 1981: 19). The possibility here is the content of the image, the projection of the image on the external world, and there is an infinite number of possibilities. The realization of the possibilities via the subject results in a finite history. Emilio Bejel, who has studied Lezama Lima from the vantage point of *history*, has summarized it, once again, in contrast to Carpentier: “The historic vision is not founded on the finding of a unique origin, an absolute source of the full emanation of history as Carpentier was looking to do in *The Lost Steps*, but a *regressive projection*

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la imagen, la metáfora.” (Garganigo *et al* 1997: 581)

<sup>12</sup> “El hombre es siempre un prodigo, de ahí que la imagen lo penetre y lo impulse.” (Lezama Lima 1981: 19)

(note the oxymoron) of two imaginary forms that come to life via the subject.”<sup>13</sup> (Bejel 1991: 131). This is a powerful umbrella image for Lezama Lima’s poetic system of the world. The history of Lezama Lima is thus not linear, nor is it cyclical, but rather, a spiral. The metaphorical subjects (poets and artists) perceive history (e.g. historical Baroque) and the image they are conjuring is infinite on its own, creating a new perception of the past, of history. This also applies to the future; the imagined future will only come to pass in one finite way. Thus, the history of Lezama Lima is the shape of a spiral, concludes Bejel, juxtaposing Lezama Lima with Spengler (*ibid.*). The moments in the past that are being invoked (such as the historical Baroque) are images that are then interpreted into the present, but it can never be identical. Thus, the interpretation stands on the same point of the x-axis, but not on the y-axis, being ever dislocated, and a *regressive projection*. Oswald Spengler’s *The Decadence of the West* is a noticeable departing point for Lezama Lima, as the dialogue with the German is easily recognizable in his works. Bejel shows that though parting from similar impulses, namely, Spengler’s affirmation *every culture founds itself in the landscape that is meant for their development*, the two arrive at opposing conclusions: “For Spengler, every culture creates their own image, and thus, history results dislocated and multiform.”<sup>14</sup> (Bejel 1991: 130) Lezama Lima, on the other hand develops a theological vision of history where the landscape has to be interpreted by the subject like an image to form a meaning, and to form a culture (Bejel 1991: 130). The relationship with the landscape is inverted, in essence. In Spengler’s case cultures become isolated and history a fragmented lineage. This is in concordance with Spengler’s pessimistic attitude towards the possibility of continuity in the Western culture. Lezama Lima, on the other hand, proposes that history is a vast possibility of reinterpretation, thus, recreation. This is directly the structure that the neobaroque can be interpreted with. Lezama Lima does not subscribe to the Spenglerian idea that each era and each culture is a separate entity and communication between these is difficult intrinsically, on the contrary, the 20th century baroque is a reinterpretation of the historical movement, and in

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<sup>13</sup> “la visión histórica no se funda en el encuentro con un origen único, una fuente absoluta de toda emanación de la historia como buscaba Carpentier en los pasos perdidos, sino en una *proyección regresiva* (nótese el oximorón) de dos formas imaginarias que cobran vida por intermedio del sujeto.” (Bejel 1991: 131)

<sup>14</sup> “Para Spengler cada cultura crea su propia imagen, por lo tanto, la historia resulta dislocada y multiforme.” (Bejel 1991: 130)

its self-referential way it is a fractalesque image, the baroque image has been recreated on the substrate of the European and American baroque. Through the *poetic subjects* baroque has attained aesthetic legibility and by its turn created history. Irlemar Chiampi agrees with Lezama Lima in that point and sketches four eras of the re-emergence of the baroque in Latin America and notes that this re-emergence has presented roughly every twenty to thirty years: first the *modernismo* of the 1880s, then the *vanguardia* of the 1920s, the *nueva novela* of the 1950s, and finally the *post-boom* of the 1970s. “In these cycles, the continuity of the Baroque reveals the contradictory nature of the Latin American experience of modernity, cannibalizing the aesthetics of rupture produced in the hegemonic centers, even as its quest for the new feeds off its own unfinished and incomplete tradition.” (Chiampi 2010: 509)

José Lezama Lima also shares one crucial point of his theory with Alejo Carpentier. He considers the baroque in the Americas an art of *counter-conquest*. Lezama Lima modifies Weisbach’s theory that the baroque was an art of *counterreformation*. In doing that, he actually opposes to the strict Catholic conservatism of the counterreformation, thus making this statement ideologically connected to the postcolonial theory. In addition to that, Lezama Lima presents how the early American baroque in the works of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz is comparable with European Gongorism, if it does not in fact surpass it. He points out the authors Hernando Domínguez Camargo, and especially Góngora’s nephew, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora, who in Lezama Lima’s interpretation might even surpass his famous uncle due to the fact that he was *free*, while Góngora was the poet laureate, “a reluctant cleric misfit living at the expense of the nobles who make him sweat tears of ink in his petitions and complaints”. (Lezama Lima 2010: 220)

Thus, because of this kind of a free and germinating American baroque, a metaphorical Baroque Gentleman of the Americas (*el señor barroco*) emerges. He is a *criollo* – a Creole, a person of Spanish descent born in the Americas (this only became accepted by the Spanish during the second and third century of the colonisation, as previously noblemen sent their wives to Spain when expecting a child to prevent the child being born in America). The Baroque Gentleman on the other hand has been born in the New World and is a vassal of the Spanish crown, yet he owns land and makes his own decisions. The

motherland is at a considerable distance. The Baroque Gentleman internalizes the vastness and the vitality of America (and reads the aforementioned *American* authors) and with the symbolic ability starts creating an America. This is, in my opinion, an auto-portrait of Lezama Lima. As following Irleamar Chiampi's system of resurgences of the baroque, Lezama Lima and Carpentier stood on the forefront of yet another reimagining of America, somewhere between the *vanguardia* and the *nueva novela*.

Lezama Lima has, consequently, quite negative opinions about the European baroque, to name a few – the proliferation of ornaments in the European baroque art is a mere passive, mechanical accumulation (*acumulación sin tensión*) and passive asymmetry (*asimetría sin plutonismo*). The baroque of the New World, on the other hand, carries in its proliferation of ornaments a dynamic tension and its asymmetry is caused by *plutonism* (a term that Lezama invented and that he never explicitly explains but which can be described as a form of destructive cosmogonic or telluric energy radiating from an ancient and volcanic *big bang* burst of violence) (Salgado 1999: 323).

Though Lezama Lima has a similar ideological tendency to that of Carpentier's, his baroque is free and germinating, emerging from Europe and possibly has further potential to fertilize, these two terms – tension and plutonism – have been included in the current work as terms that can be used to approach the neobaroque poetics of prose.

### **1.3. Severo Sarduy**

Severo Felipe Sarduy Aguilar was born in Camagüey, Cuba in the year 1937. In the year 1959, he left Cuba to go and study art in Europe. He would never set foot on Cuban soil again. He took permanent residence in Paris in 1961, where his closest friends and intellectual partners were François Wahl, Roland Barthes, Gustavo Guerrero, Philippe Sollers, and Julia Kristeva, among others. Throughout his life, he called himself Lezama Lima's pupil and revered him to be the greatest author of the Americas. He worked for years as a cultural editor for Radio France, taught in universities and contributed to the publications of the Tel Quel group. This external standpoint towards Cuba gave him a very different view of the Latin American baroque. Although Sarduy himself always

remained a self-proclaimed American author, his views surpass Carpentier's and Lezama Lima's postcolonial interpretations, and the ideological reclaiming of the Americas did not seem to matter to him all to that extent. Having attended Jacques Lacan's *Séminaires* in the *École Normale Supérieure*, Sarduy starts creating a structuralist theory, which later becomes more of a parallel to the post-structuralist theories.

In Sarduyan essays, the process of neobaroque writing is equalized to the signifying chain. Sarduy states that the baroque is “an uncontrollable proliferation of signifiers”<sup>15</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 1390). Thus, it is no surprise that Sarduy's neobaroque theory is deeply rooted in Lacanian language philosophy. Combining that with post-structuralist influences, Buddhism and other Asian themes and his own love of everything camp and kitsch, he produces several central essayistic texts of the neobaroque discourse, the most important of those being *The Baroque and the Neobaroque* (1972) and *Barroco* (1974), both great examples of neobaroque poetics on their own. It is necessary to note that Sarduy's post-structuralist influences only intensify towards the end of his life, reaching a point in *Simulación* (1983) where he believes representation might be ultimately impossible. For Sarduy, the baroque is extreme artifice, nothing more than dynamism, heterogeneity, and transgression on a purely linguistic level. In *The Baroque and the Neobaroque*, he compares the neobaroque to eroticism – pure waste of words, overabundance of words in order to achieve pleasure. In doing that, he in fact criticizes Alejo Carpentier's postcolonial treatment of the baroque (yet not Lezama Lima's) (Sarduy 1999: 1401). In this essay, Sarduy traces the primary structure of his views on the neobaroque. He gives the categories of *artifice* and *parody*.

Under artificialization, Sarduy introduces three different processes – the baroque substitution (*sustitución barroca*), proliferation, and condensation. These will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

For Sarduy, all neobaroque writing is parody. There would be no Góngora without the romances or no Cervantes without the chivalric novels. He reverses Robert Jammes' statement: “To the extent this ballad by Góngora is the disfigurement (*démarquage*) of a

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<sup>15</sup> “la proliferación incontrolada de significantes” (Sarduy 1999: 1390)

previous ballad which must be read in filigree in order to enjoy it completely, it can be said that it belongs to a minor genre, since it exists only in reference to the earlier work.” (Sarduy 2010: 279). Sarduy’s statement says the opposite: “only insofar as a work of the Latin American Baroque is the disfigurement of a previous work which must be *read in filigree* to enjoy it completely does it belong to a major genre,” (Sarduy: 2010: 280). The case study that is presented in the last paragraph of this work focuses on the novel *Colibrí*, which comments on and parodies the genre of the great *novela de selva*, a quintessential Latin American genre that helped create the identity of Latin America during the 20th century.

Extrapolating from that, Sarduy posits that the three main characteristics of baroque writing are mirror, revolution and eroticism, which is a fear of the vacuum, the *horror vacui*, the constant search for the desired object and the inevitable failure of that effort. For Sarduy, the neobaroque writing equals a game, while the traditional writing equals work. A reader and a critic should be able to sigh: “cuánto esfuerzo sin funcionalidad!” – “How much effort without any functionality!”

Though there is a dizzying array of scholarly studies on the history of the baroque, not much has changed in the prejudices that equate (mainly due to the obscure nature of dictionaries) the baroque with *outlandish*, *eccentric*, even *cheap*. This rejection hides a moral attitude. Sarduy states that baroque has been morally repressed, as a deviation or an anomaly of a previous, balanced and pure form. He then signals the change in attitude towards aesthetic beauty that took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (as in Baudelaire) which leads to the different attitude towards baroque in the works of the Catalan Eugenio d’Ors (Sarduy 1999: 1881–1954). Namely, the influence of the Lacanian thought system, where all signifiers have to be in the same system to have a meaning, the signifiers can only refer to other signifiers, thus are arbitrary. The fact that the word *barroco* is somehow connected to uneven pearls is arbitrary and does not affect the content and characteristics of neobaroque aesthetics. Sarduy thus criticizes the way other theorists have focused on the etymological origins of the word *baroque*, specifically the way that it is presumed that the nature of things would be written in the words that name them. To illustrate that he presents his own version of an etymological definition of the term *Barroco* by comparing



the words that sound similar, first referring to the irregular pearl in different languages (*barroco*, *barrueco*, *berrueco*), then to an obscure student of the painters Carracci, who might have been called Baroque, but was probably only a mannerist, then invents a scholastic syllogism “Baroco”, that was used for mnemotechnics at the time, then inserts some dictionary definitions. But in the end he decides on the allusion to the word *barro* – mud (Sarduy 1999: 1385). With this description, he has effectively created a critique of the scholars who have focused on the etymological meanings of the word, and at the same time demonstrated a neobaroque signifying chain. Mud is the perfect image for the baroque of Sarduy, plastic, sticky, unpleasant at times, but might allow for many different activities, some of which might be very pleasant.

In the long essay *Barroco* (1974), Sarduy elaborates his neobaroque theory. As well as Carpentier and Calabrese, he also has a generalizing aim in mind, but instead of basing the investigation on ideological contradictions or a vague formalist decision, Sarduy opts for a neobaroque reading of the *cosmos*. He decides not to try to locate the neobaroque within the Latin American *tellus*, but tries to connect it to the development of the cosmological views that human beings have had during the last two thousand years, from a geocentric cosmology to the latest developments of the Big Bang theory. The overview of cosmologies gives an ingenious description of the baroque, which is much more connected to the text itself, not so much the *context*. Thus, Sarduy does not deal with the socio-political backgrounds of the Keplerian cosmologic revolution, which is the impulse of the historical Baroque. In Sarduy's overview, he never answers the question “why?” This is a programmatic choice, as he does not wish to indulge in similar ideological discussions as do Carpentier and Lezama Lima. Therefore, he focuses on the speed, the quality, sounds, smell, the totality of the explosion (*signifying chain*) instead of the instigator of the explosion. The neobaroque cosmology is a model for the neobaroque image, which, like it should in a fractalesque universe, mimics the structure of the cosmos.

## 1.4 Jacques Lacan's and Roland Barthes's language philosophy

The classic thesis of Lacan, and one of the most well known is the maxim “the unconscious is structured like a language” (*Seminaire XI*).

Already the first paragraph of the article *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reasons since Freud* (*L'instance de la lettre dans l'inconscient ou la raison depuis Freud*) in *Écrits* presents us with a reformulation of the above motto: “beyond this ‘speech’, what the psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious is the whole structure of language.” (Lacan 2003: 163) For Lacan, as for Sarduy, psychoanalysis as a practice is something that is strictly situated within the bounds of *language* and depends on the psychoanalyst's manage and understanding of it. Because, as he goes on, language defines everything we are, and contrary to the book of Genesis, which starts with mute creation and only subsequent use of *word* to create light, in Lacan's universe the word is before everything else: “‘in the beginning was the act’, is itself reversed in its turn: it was certainly the Word (*verbe*) that was in the beginning, and we live in its creation,” (Lacan 2008: 67). In this sense Lacan would have appreciated the same Mayan myths that Carpentier refers to in *Popol Vuh* where the engendering spirits say *earth* and at the same moment the earth already exists (Carpentier 1990: 344). He explains, unconscious is like language due to material support that it borrows from language (Lacan 2003: 163).

Language is something pertaining to the second of the fundamental reference sets of Lacan – the symbolic. Language itself *is* the symbolic as the symbolic can only exist in and through language.

First, let us explore the signifier – the mark that we can see or hear; that which is said or written. A pure signifier, says Lacan, only refers to other signifiers. The classic Lacanian example of this is a dictionary: to “explain” a signifier, the dictionary offers only another amount of signifiers. Elaborated from that: “No signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification” (Lacan 2003: 165). To get closer to the term signifier one first has to start with the term *sign*, which is “as Peirce put it, that which is in the place of something else for someone,” (Lacan 2008: 112). Therefore, in order for a sign to exist, there has to be a certain schema of communication at some level. A receiver, some sort of code and a message, the emitter of a sign can be any entity. In *Fonction et*

*champ* Lacan (2003: 68–71) meticulously shows the difference of mere *signs* and *language*, which consists of signifiers: “But is it [a sign] necessarily a language? We can say that it is distinguished from language precisely by the fixed correlation of its signs to the reality they signify.” (Lacan 2003: 92) On the contrary, a signifier’s most important characteristic is exactly this *lack* of fixity: “a signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier. This signifier will therefore be the signifier for which all the other signifiers represent the subject: that is to say, in the absence of this signifier, all the other signifiers represent nothing, since nothing is represented only *for* something else.” (Lacan 2003: 350) Let us remind here Sarduy’s mockery of the etymological analysis of the word *baroque*.

The *signifier* of Jacques Lacan has a quality of effacing, of absence and negativity to that of the *trace* (*Seminaire III*). In the realm of the signifier it is necessary for a system to exist, in which every element is connected to every other element and therefore every element refers to (and only refers to) other elements in the same system. The example given by Lacan continues the story of Robinson Crusoe and Friday. Robinson marks Friday’s footprint (trace) with an arbitrary marker (signifier) – a cross. In this case, the form of the marker is arbitrary, as the cross could indicate anything; it certainly does not have a direct and fixed link of “meaning” connected to Friday or a footprint. The cross only makes sense in a system created by Robinson if connected to other signifiers. Robinson could have marked the footprint with a rock, a seashell, a circle or his own walking stick (or better yet, *drawn* a map).

Language is very much the same. Words, though not bearing any cause-effect connection to objects of the physical world, always stand in connection to other words, like in the dictionary, infinitely. This is why we are able to complete questionnaires and crossword puzzles, fill in blanks and anticipate action or reaction from those surrounding us – our whole self, the conscious *and* the subconscious work in a similar way, always trying to connect one signifier to another, trying to get closer and closer to the *exact* meaning. Yet this is ultimately impossible. We produce more and more signifiers in order to reach the *true* signification, the essence of the object – but, as Lacan puts it, we can never get to the point when pointing the proverbial index finger would suffice to capture the *signified*,

which eludes the signifier like a magnet of the same charge value, always slipping away under it. Trying to signify the signified will inevitably only produce another flood of signifiers, which refuse to take on their assigned meaning-partners finitely and exhaustively. The signifier and signified are in an everlasting flickering dance, always connected, yet not being able to occupy the other's *locus*.

In the last paragraph a good description of Lacan's term *signifying chain* has been given. This has also been taken as the principal characteristic of the baroque in the present work. The *process* of signification and over-signification is the core element of all baroque poetics. This however is in no means exclusive to the baroque. Yet, it differs from many other literary currents due to the concentration and the metafictional manner it deals with this process (further on that in 2.5). A neobaroque text's theme *is* the signifying chain, it says – "Look, I am commenting on the fact that I cannot fully signify".

It is to be added here that this structure is not absolute. If the sliding of the signifier over the signified would be absolute and perfect, the world we know would not exist; we could not have created language, literature, nor our imaginary self. In order to explain the possibility of some sort of understanding, Lacan has presented the idea of a *point de capiton*. "The multitude of 'floating signifiers', of proto-ideological elements, is structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning." (Žižek 2008b: 95) A *point de capiton* is an instance where the signifier can occupy the place of the signified (which is a void and its place is therefore easy to fill), which can be called the metaphoric cut, saying one thing and meaning something very different, it produces a momentary process on the surfaces, the limits between the symbolic and the real in the Lacanian topography, producing an overwhelming, on the one hand exquisite and on the other hand terrifying sensation – *jouissance* (fr. physical or intellectual pleasure, delight, or ecstasy, also, orgasm<sup>16</sup>). The imperfections in the surface of the baroque language have been collected here into the next chapter, where they stand as the structure for a possible neobaroque poetics.

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<sup>16</sup> Oxford English Dictionary

Roland Barthes in the seminal text *The Pleasure of the Text* also gives a similar description of the *point de capiton*, the site of *bliss* (Barthes 1975: 3), the edge, “the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the dissolve which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss” (*ibid.* 6–7). Barthes operates with largely the same images – signifier, void, loss, but for him the motivating force of signification and the production of a certain text is the enjoyment it can produce. He distinguishes two different processes within this force, the pleasure (*plaisir*) and the bliss (*jouissance*). In Lacan, *jouissance* is the excess of pleasure, an extension of pleasure, the amount of it that is left when the signifying process takes over all of the signifying capability of a human being, and the bearing of this excess is *jouissance*, the orgasm of text. In Barthes, it is a type of pleasure; the pleasure of the text is bliss (*jouissance*), which is a “more intellectual pleasure than the other [the corporeal]: an Oedipal pleasure (to denude, to know, to learn the origin and the end), if it is true that every narrative (every unveiling of the truth) is a staging of the (absent, hidden , or hypostatized) father,” (Barthes 1975: 10) and from that also the *bliss text*, which is a text “that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts, (perhaps to the point of a certain boredom), unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes, values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language” (Barthes 1975: 14). This is exactly what the neobaroque texts are – they create a specific reading experience, which is uncomfortable to an extent, as it is not usual. The reading experience of a neobaroque text will be analysed in the chapter 2.1. Both Sarduy and Lezama have created texts of bliss, Carpentier, in my opinion, to a lesser extent. This is immediately perceived in the reading process.

The possibility of the Lacanian signifying processes (metonymy and metaphor, Lacan 2003: 181) can be explained by the nature of the signified. For Lacan, the signified is something that is already very close to his reference set of the *real*. And the real is a void, a void of symbolization. It is the locus where symbolization ceases and does not continue. Žižek recaps: “It is already a classic Lacanian thesis that ‘the big Other’ [that is, the symbolic order as a consistent, closed totality] does not exist, and the subject is denoted by \$, the crossed, blocked S, a void, an empty place in the signifier's structure.” (Žižek 2008b: 77) In the topography of the subject, *the real* can only be perceived as the void, as the empty space the symbolization process leaves within the subject. The real leaves a

negative imprint within the human psyche and we can only sense the edge, the *limen* of the real, but never that which is inside. Therefore, the metaphoric process is enabled by the void that is the signified, leaving a space to fill it with signifiers.

Barthes also speaks of the void where the real resides, yet his attention, as stressed earlier, is on the edges. “Neither culture nor its destruction is erotic; it is the seam between them, the fault, the flaw, which becomes so. The pleasure of the text is like that untenable, impossible, purely *novelistic* instant so relished by Sade’s libertine when he manages to be hanged and then to cut the rope at the very moment of his orgasm, his bliss.” (Barthes 1975: 7) Sarduy illustrates it wonderfully in *Colibrí* – Colibrí, the protagonist of the novel, sees a shepherd while wandering around the jungle. “Through the rips in the fabric as a warning, on the well-built right arm, two tattoos could be seen,”<sup>17</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 748). This happens in a state of a narcotic trip that the enemies had given Colibrí. The shepherd is actually one of the minions of the bad boss. Yet even the narcotics have flaws, and the tattoos, which Colibrí could have recognized, but did not, can be seen flickering through the cracks like the real, the truth.

Lacan’s subject is a split subject (\$), always barred from entering the position of the signified. Žižek puts it: “the subject can never fully “become himself”, he can never fully realize himself, he only ex-sists as the void of a distance from the Thing.” (Žižek 2008a: 207)

This tension created by the dual constitution of the subject, as the subject of both the signifier and the signified is the source of poetry, is the reason why we still create words, to reach the unreachable place where we are and have always been under the rule of the symbolic. This has already been mentioned but begs repeating – the desire of signification is the driving force of man.

If the distance between the signifier and the signified is unusually large and filled with an engendering force, an electricity – as is the case with the neobaroque – it starts an explosive flood of signifiers, much like fireworks, giving an almost sensory pleasure,

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<sup>17</sup> “Por las desgarraduras de la tela se advertían, en el fornido brazo derecho, dos tatuajes,” (Sarduy 1999: 748)

which is not always pleasant as it can be frightful and overwhelming, but every time it drives the reader's attention to the void where the subject crouches, to them as subjects of the signifying process. Maybe this is the best way of explaining the subject – it is in the *process*, in the delightful fireworks of an unusual and inventive signifying process that human beings are the closest to their fleeting selves.

## To Summarize

In the previous chapters, it has been established that there exists a flourishing and long tradition of investigation on the subject of the baroque resurgence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite struggles during the change of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the baroque had become the main discourse in the literary theory of Latin America. The authors who reclaimed it for the Americas in their essayistic as well as fictional works were the Cubans Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima. Alejo Carpentier treats the baroque in a very postcolonial manner, leading to the too generalizing of a conclusion that the Americas have always been baroque and the baroque is a universal spirit. José Lezama Lima does the same, but to a much lesser extent, creating the vision of the American baroque on nature and the syncretic culture after the *Conquista*. He roots it in Europe but continues to show that the American Baroque has been truly free and germinating. Lezama Lima presents two productive terms, *plutonism* and *tension*, which will be incorporated in the emerging poetics. The last Cuban and the focus of the thesis is Severo Sarduy, who was the first American thinker to marry the American discourse of the baroque with the European structuralism and post-structuralism. Relying upon the texts of Jacques Lacan and Roland Barthes, Sarduy proposes a theory of the neobaroque that does not stem from postcolonialism. He is looking for a universal interpretation, which is mostly presented in the essays *The Baroque and the Neobaroque* and *Barroco*. Following Lacan, Sarduy bases his view of the baroque on the process of signification, its mechanisms and flaws. Signification is ultimately impossible, because every signifier can just be referred to with an amount of other signifiers. Due to that, the signifying chain forms, where signifiers follow each other in a metonymical or a metaphoric process. In a neobaroque text, this is especially pronounced as the connections between signifiers are loose, odd and distant. In the following chapters, the characteristics of a neobaroque prose poetics are extrapolated based on this framework, using as a basis the fictional and essayistic texts of the three Cuban authors. In the last chapter, the resulting poetics is applied to Severo Sarduy's novel *Colibrí*, in order to test and amend it, if necessary.



## 2. In Search of the Neobaroque Image: Towards a Neobaroque Poetics of Prose

In this chapter, a methodology is developed on the basis of the previous introductions of the different approaches of Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, Severo Sarduy, Jacques Lacan, and Roland Barthes. A poetics of the neobaroque prose is sketched. However, as is commonplace in the baroque, the tools to analyse it must be baroque in turn. The current work does not aspire towards a totality, but a suggestion towards a prose poetics in the neobaroque style.

Firstly, the constructed poetics rejects the necessity of *understanding*. It is not possible to understand the text on a level that we are used to in this case, as it is usually rather difficult to pinpoint a plot, characters, or conflict. It cannot be read as a *pleasure* text of Barthes'. Furthermore, as presented earlier in the introduction of Jacques Lacan's language philosophy, signification is ultimately impossible due to the hermetic nature of the signifying chain. Therefore, the current work does not aspire towards an *explanation*. Instead, it tries to present a possible *reading* that would highlight the process, the *how* of neobaroque.

Techniques that are common in the analysis of poetry are used. This will help to identify the codification and over-codification, interpretation and over-interpretation present in the texts, encompassing terms from different backgrounds and contents, and applying those to different layers of the text.

The context of and the *meaning*, above all, are not focused on explicitly. The focus of this work is language, imagery and poetic devices. It attempts to bring together the two types of poetics – the poetics of prose and poetry, yet giving the emphasis to smaller building blocks of the text (phrase, expression, image, word), though also alluding to higher levels, in the spirit of Todorov's *The Poetry of Prose*, which was mentioned in the introduction of this work.

It has become commonplace, that poetry is analysed with the help of categories like poetic devices, language, structure, rhythm, etc. This is not as expected of prose poetics, and it is understandable. Prose as a form is less concentrated, longer, and the capacities of analyses are limited. To analyse a novel, let us say *Don Quijote*, taking just small elements of the textual plain, seems an impossible and an aimless task. Yet linguistics uses the statistical analysis of text, and from linguistics to formalism and from formalism to (post-)structuralism is a short jump.

This MA thesis proposes that it would be very fruitful to combine the methods of prose poetics and traditional poetic analysis to reach a new understanding of the usage of language, the usage of poetic language, and the way we create meaning. This comes about already because the text is longer; there is a lot more material to analyse. It would also be very revealing to find connections between the lower and higher strata of text – metonymy in the structure of a novel, character studies mixed with the information poetic analysis presents, an untraditional plot affecting the use of images, etc. Moreover, be an interesting addendum to genre theory. Here, the focus will be on literary devices such as metaphor, metonymy, alliteration, epithets, repetition, etc.

In neobaroque, everything is a game, everything is language and everything is a commentary. Bearing in mind the exposition of Lacan's theory presented previously, and of Todorov's theory, one of the aims of the work at hand is thus to show that poetic images and the usage of poetic devices conveys a specific additional meaning, for example that the higher levels of the text are motivated by the lower level, the image, and vice versa, the overall text dictates, which images should be used. To do this in a neobaroque text will result the easiest, as the over-codification of it has been admittedly intentional. Yet, the possibility of applying this poetics to a literary classic of any era should be tested as well.

Taking as a departure point the main thesis of Severo Sarduy's in *El barroco y el neobarroco*, the primary aesthetic quality that should be underlined and searched for in a neobaroque text is *artifice*. This is a notion where Sarduy opposes d'Ors and also Carpentier and Lezama Lima in saying that the baroque is *not* a return to *nature*: "The Baroque festival seems to us, on the contrary, with its repetition of volutes, arabesques

and masks, embellished sombreros and reflecting silks, the apotheosis of artifice.”<sup>18</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 1387) This is a very valid point, which will be dissected further in the following sub-chapters. If we take as a general presupposition that the historical Baroque and neobaroque *are* connected, that there is a continuity of sorts, that runs from the 17th century to the present, that these two are not completely removed from each other, and when just choosing a few examples from the literature of the historical Baroque, the artifice in the main works is so pronounced, it would be difficult to continue on the route *baroque-as-nature*: Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Cervantes, Lope de Vega, Sor Juana, and, of course, Góngora. The Counter-Reformation was carried by the *carnival*. Nevertheless, as presented in the first chapter of the current work, there were ideological considerations that have caused this inversion, and the Latin American nature itself must be considered, as well. The proportions, colour, smells and sounds are so vast, almost technicolor – the colonizers unfortunately had not had the pleasure of seeing a TV yet, but for example already the chronicles of Columbus’ first voyage are filled with fantastical images, that are worthy of Rabelais: “And I saw many trees that were very different from our trees, and many of these had different kinds of branches and all in one trunk and one branch looks a certain way and the other a different way, all so disfigured which is the biggest miracle in the world,”<sup>19</sup> (de las Casas 1892). It is no surprise, that the Latin American nature will be interpreted differently due to its vastness, its relative pristine nature, as by the 15th century the Southern European virgin forests had been long depleted and mostly turned into parks. However, it is exactly this specificity that has to be emphasized here, the subject can only *interpret* the outside world, create signifiers for it and try to correlate it with other familiar signifiers, but in doing that, the subject is *creating* the Americas, not the other way round. The Americas is a fiction and by the 20th century, it was an elaborate fiction (*viz.* Lezama Lima’s *Baroque Gentleman*). “The first American to emerge as a master of his fortune is our Baroque gentleman. With his luxurious Dutch spine of Ronsard, his covers spread over

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<sup>18</sup> “El festín barroco nos parece, al contrario, con su repetición de volutas, de arabescos y máscaras, de confitados sombreros y espejeantes sedas, la apoteosis del artificio.” (Sarduy 1999: 1387)

<sup>19</sup> “Y vi muchos árboles muy disformes de los nuestros, y de ellos muchos que tenían los ramos de muchas maneras y todo en un pie, y un ramito es de una manera y otro de otra, y tan disforme que es la mayor maravilla del mundo.” (de las Casas 1892)

Mantuan swan, his recondite sheets of miscellaneous mischief by Góngora or Polo de Medina, the silvery pearls of Góngora's sonnets and the imprisoned bones of Quevedo's sonnets. Before reclining in leisure, he holds in the elaborate column that is his right hand a cup of *soconusco*, the gift of his strict ecclesiastical upbringing, drinking with Cartesian caution to avoid the unpolished amethyst of gout. Ensconced now in the grand concave chair of the *oidor*, he watches the *sans culotts* (sic) coming and going in slow waves, gray, true and eternal." (Lezama Lima 2010: 213–214) Here Lezama Lima stresses the contradictoriness, the Europeaness and at the same time the Americanness of the Gentleman, who marries together the two sides of the ocean. From Pierre de Ronsard he moves on to the Mantuan swan, referring to Virgil's Aeneid, to *soconusco*, the Mexican hot chocolate, which is mentioned in Bernal Díaz de Castillo's chronicles, to *sans culottes* of the French Revolution, it is a mixture of elements that at the first sight do not meld together.

One of the aims of Severo Sarduy's essay *The Baroque and the Neobaroque* is to stress that tautology does not always carry a negative connotation; it is a necessary tool of the neobaroque, as it takes part in the process of the proliferation of meaning, of the doubling, of the mirrors. On the other hand, there *are* subtle contrasts that have been created by the different levels of text being read, and the intertextuality of the text analysed. This type of analysis will expectedly bring about conflict in the description of the aesthetics, which might be resolved when applying the poetics to the text.

This strategy might be illustrated by a quote from Jüri Talvet, the professor of literature in the University of Tartu, the founder of the Hispanic studies department, the leading researcher on Hispanic subjects, a translator and an author of both fiction as well as several monographs. In the collection of articles *Hispaania vaim* (The Spanish Spirit, 1995), he comments on the dynamics of the historical Baroque. As we have established the presumption that there is a connection between the historical Baroque and the resurgence of the baroque in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the quote is also revealing for the interpretation of that:

"The external dynamics of literature could not exist without the internal dynamics – the innovation of the creation itself, the contradiction to the existing norm. The historical and

social contradictions create a backdrop for the inner conflict of the baroque literature and for its dynamics. Contradiction is the key condition for movement and development. In art and in literature conflict takes a specifically aesthetic form and can no longer be directly projectable to socio-historic conflicts.

The most fundamental characteristic of the Baroque literature is the coexistence of different strata, of a multi-layered nature. /---/ Different layers usually oppose each other, are antinomous. Yet one of the most important traits of the Baroque is – these layers are not necessarily antagonistic, instead they coexist, interact, and are dialogical to a certain extent”<sup>20</sup> (Talvet 1995: 151, translation by author – K.L)

The same is once again stressed by Roland Barthes: “who endures contradiction without shame?” (Barthes 1975: 3) A reader of a *bliss text* will, a reader of a neobaroque text will, and will revel in these contradictions. In order to create a poetics of the neobaroque that can be applied to a text, different strata of the text must be considered. Often these comparisons will bring about contradictions, which is one of the defining characteristics of the neobaroque. These contradictions may come about in the structure, but also, in form.

The following is therefore not a traditional academic rationale where cause precedes effect. As is suitable in a neobaroque text, there are a number of *retombées*, It is a labyrinth of connected yet independent terms that create a neobaroque intertext, from which the unattainable *signified* shines through. With the help of the connotations that surface the novel *Colibrí* will be read in the third chapter of the current work. The categories are being developed by applying them to the essayistic and fictional works of the authors, as this will create an even more pronounced tautology, and will create new meaning necessary to facilitate a decentred reading of Sarduy's *Colibrí* further on.

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<sup>20</sup> ”Kirjanduse väline dünaamika ei saaks eksisteerida ilma sisemiseta – loomingu enda uuenduslikkuset: vastuoluta, vastandumiseta senisele normile. Ajalooline ja ühiskondlik vastuolu loob tausta barokk-kirjanduse sisemisele konfliktusele ja ühtlasi dünaamikale. Vastuolu on liikumise ja arengu põhitingimus. Kirjanduses ja kunstis omandab vastuolu mõistagi spetsiifiliselt esteetilise kuju ega ole enam otseselt tagasiviidav ühiskondlik-ajaloolisele vastuolule. Barokk-kirjanduse fundamentaalseim tunnus on erisuguste tasandite kooselu, paljutasandilisus. /---/ Erinevad tasandid enamasti vastanduvad üksteisele, on antinoomsed. Ent üks olulisemaid baroki tunnuseid on see, et tasandid ei ole ilmtingimata antagonistlikud, vaid eksisteerivad koos, toimivad üksteisele, on teatud määral dialoogilised.“ (Talvet 1995: 151)

## 2.1. Plutonism

The category of plutonism is first found in José Lezama Lima's text *The Baroque Curiosity* (1957), where he states that the European baroque boasts of an accumulation without tension, an asymmetry without plutonism, while the American baroque does represent “an originary fire that breaks the fragments and unifies them” (Lezama Lima 2005: 1435). A plutonist image is one where the original elements are broken down and fused into a new image that makes sense in the universe of the text, and only there. Just like the tectonic movements of the Earth's core, where on one extreme the Earth is being constantly swallowed, destroyed, and becomes a part of the Earth's mantle and on the other extreme the magma oozes out from the Earth's core.

Let us first apply the plutonist image to an example Lezama Lima gives – the *indiatid* (Lezama Lima 2010: 216). The *indiatid*, which is an amalgamation of the Indian woman and the Greek caryatids, were carved sculptural columns used to support portals. This is a perfectly neobaroque image, two women from anachronistic cultures fused into one from different starting materials. Moreover, it is a plutonist image on the level of the word, a portmanteau. The *indiatid*, when created, acquires connotations of religiosity and eroticism, the old (world) vs the new (world). Yet there is a common part, a metonymical connection, both parts of the *indiatid* are distant to the reader because both signifiers, the Indian woman and the Greek caryatid existed in a different temporal reality. The fact that an *indiatid* is a historical architectural detail raises the self-referentiality of it, a combination of two historical women in a historical context. The factor to note here is the indivisibility of the image, the two women cannot be broken apart, as the image is greater than the sum of its parts, and yet dividing it would not result in two complete halves. The only way to destroy a plutonist image is to break it into pieces and create a completely new image of those. A *retombée* that echoes the following chapter, states that the parts of a plutonist image cannot be connected if they do not have tension. This tension may be positive or negative – like two magnets, whether you hold them, either the plus and minus sign together or the two similar charges together (++ or --), the magnets will snap together or struggle at a distance from each other, not uniting, nor rejecting each other. The fact is, magnets, as the parts of a plutonist image, are never indifferent towards each

other. There is a reason, whether an attraction or a rejection, that is keeping them together.

Sarduy presents his similar concept, the baroque condensation as a signifying process of the artifice where two or more elements are joined together to form a constellation that seems *marvellous*, strange or unintelligible. It is a process similar to Freud's dream work condensation. By using ambivalent or multivalent signifiers, the author creates a work of art that has several different readings, depending on the position of the reader (Sarduy 1999: 1391). As with the category of plutonism, the result is bigger than the sum of its parts. Sarduy brings examples of portmanteaus from another Cuban novelist, Guillermo Cabrera Infante: (from Sarduy 1999: 1392, with my comments) permutations like *O se me valla un gayo*, which is an unmeasurably clever condensation, a word play. The expression *O se me vaya el gallo* means *or my voice will go (hoarseness)*. As the phonemes *ll* and *y* sound the same in Cuban Spanish, their places have been switched, also changing the meaning to *or my poetry will be confined*, or, an alternative reading, *or my poetry will be gay*. Condensations like *amosclavo* (*amo* 'master'; *esclavo* 'slave') or *maquinoscrito* (*máquina* 'machine'; *escrito* 'written', compare *manuscrito* 'manuscript'), to name a few of the simplest. These are the types of very pronounced *germinating nuclei* that allow for an interpretation and an enjoyment of the *jouissance*. Due to the loaded nature of the process, the plutonist devices seem to be mostly smaller textual elements, as fusing together larger pieces of text might be very difficult due to the tension, they would either meld together or rip apart. Yet this might work with quotes, and, as shown previously, with permutations.

This would be a good opportunity to discuss the difficulties associated with *reading* a neobaroque text. There are three strategies to read a novel or an essay by the three authors presented in this thesis. The first would be to read just the surface, not stopping, still enjoying the linguistic fireworks, but moving on fast. This reading strategy does not even require basic *e.g.* Spanish language skills, it can be done without understanding what is said, like reading a non-semantic novel. This might result in a reading time that for example a popular storybook of the same size would take, and could be very useful to find poetic devices like alliteration, metrum, repetition. The second strategy is to try to *understand* everything. This strategy I have already rejected previously. This would

probably conclude with the book not being finished. The third strategy is to read the germinating nuclei of the work. This is a very strange but successful strategy for the reading of neobaroque texts. Both Carpentier and Lezama Lima use the term *filigree* to describe the baroque in general, to denote a meticulous, over-codified and concentrated text that has a high concentration of germinating nuclei (images, poetic devices, vocabulary, which create an explosion of signification) – which results in an effect similar to that of a silver filigree. Thus, I propose, neobaroque texts should be read like filigree, following the lines where they go, and in a germinating nucleus, a concentration point of the lines, which is an image where the condensated signifiers are especially far from each other, enjoy the larger void of the signified, which creates a more powerful signifying chain. This renders the neobaroque reading strategy a rhythmical experience, which adds to the poetic structure of the text. Furthermore, the condensation points can be easily compared with stressed syllables, calling for a metric investigation of the neobaroque prose.

Roland Barthes has also described the reading process of a *bliss text*, which is a similar process to which I have just described: “the other reading skips nothing, it weighs, it sticks to the text, it reads, so to speak, with application and transport, grasps at every point in the text the asyndeton which cuts the various languages – and not the anecdote: it is not (logical) extension that captivates it, the winnowing out of the truths, but the layering of significance; as in the children’s game of topping hands, the excitement comes not from a processive haste but from a kind of vertical din (the verticality of language and its destruction);” (Barthes 1975: 12)

## **2.2. Tension**

“Tension is the fortune of a formal mark of the American Baroque art which, instead of accumulating, like the European Baroque, or juxtaposing disparate elements in the composition, it combines them to reach a unifying form”<sup>21</sup> (Chiampi 2005: 361) The

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<sup>21</sup> “Tensión es una suerte de marca formal del arte barroco americano que en vez de acumular, como el barroco europeo, o yuxtaponer los elementos dispares en la composición, los combina para alcanzar la forma unitiva”. (Chiampi 2005: 361)



tension that Lezama Lima describes is a tension between two elements that do not usually belong together in the external world. Which means this is the partner of the previous term discussed, plutonism. At its most active, the two (or more) elements are brought gradually together until they stand at an optimal distance where the conflict is the greatest. Tension usually comes from the energy that is trying to separate the two elements, yet when the tension is overcome (usually by adding more elements, other signifying chains) this process might continue in a plutonist way towards a fusion. Lezama Lima brings an example from the Latin American *mestizo* culture, specifically the hybrid way the church portals of Juli and Puno in Peru are ornamented.

The process of tension in a neobaroque text is usually represented by the choice of unusual vocabulary. Sarduy does not analyse his own usage of language, although it does bear mentioning. Both Sarduy and Lezama Lima (especially in *Paradiso*) use a dizzying array of uncommon vocabulary, including technical terms, Latin species names, Cuban slang, not to mention the vocabulary they have invented or disfigured on purpose. As stated earlier, the neobaroque has markedly taken the question of language and vocabulary as its theme, and Sarduy's collection of poetry *Big Bang* is the best example of that. This is usually represented by the use of obtrusively different types of language. *Big Bang* is a fragmentary collection of seemingly scientific texts and texts on a very high *poetic* style level, as per the usual signification of the word – inner monologue, specifically poetic vocabulary –, which are opposed to each other on the basis of their *styles*, or poetic tonalities, the scientific and the highly poetic. Poetic language is just a type of specialized language. Sarduy uses it to contrast two specialized languages by first juxtaposing the quasi-scientific quotes with inner monologue. In the course of the short collection, the *poetic* language starts taking over the *scientific* language, leaving only poetry in the end. E.g. from the text *Isomorphia (Isomorfia)*: “The American astronomer Allan R. Sandage revealed at the congress of astrophysics that is being held currently in Texas, that in June 1966 the astronomers at Monte Palomar had borne witness to the most gigantic explosions of a celestial object ever observed by man.”<sup>22</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 166) Which is juxtaposed to

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<sup>22</sup> “El astrónomo americano Allan R. Sandage reveló, en el congreso de astrofísica que se desarrolla actualmente en Texas, que en junio de 1966 los astrónomos de Monte Palomar habían sido testigos de las más gigantescas de las explosiones de un objeto celeste jamás observada por el hombre.” (Sarduy 1999:

– “From the stained, high chandelier – against the crystals the stroke of sand –, the light falls, mustard cone.”<sup>23</sup> (*Ibid.*)

The difference is specifically distinct in this example. Sarduy has amplified it by *graphically* distinguishing the two styles, as well, the “poetic” language in cursive. The tension between the two styles keeps growing until the poetic language takes over and devours the scientific language in a plutonist process, leaving a new form, a list of words positioned in a constellation. It would be possible to speculate that the positioning of the words is a commentary on the processes of tension and plutonism, the reader *must* either try and understand the constellation like a connect-the-dots puzzle (which still does not result in a *meaning*), or they might just enjoy the separate words, the distances between the signifiers connected by tension, which only come together through the act of reading, and the resulting signifying chains that erupt:

“XV  
SUN  
lemon            white pheasant  
the bare feet                    dust of dry saffron  
in the water            inverted            the wall  
                                 hum  
                                 circle  
                                 sun”

(Sarduy 1999: 174)

Here it must be added that the poetic process of *contradiction* is also a sub-product of the neobaroque tension. The contradiction is a poetic device that is caused by tension and is usually detectable on the level of the word-based signifying chain. There is a

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166))

<sup>23</sup> “De la lucerna manchada, alta - contra los cristales el golpe de la arena-, la luz cae, cono mostaza.” (*ibid.*)

contradiction, an unexplainable *error* in the reasoning and the logic of the text, the connections that appear in the text, previously stated phrases are contradicted, etc. All of which might seem like a mistake by the author, but most likely is not.

### 2.3. Horror vacui

Despite the aforementioned problems in the applications of the baroque in categories that stem from the works of Alejo Carpentier, in *Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso*, as previously shown in chapter 1.2, he offers a productive juxtaposition of the baroque and the Classicist on the basis of Classicist and historical Baroque architecture, which is a common strategy used by almost all of the authors and critics as well. Carpentier's description can be translated into a poetic process of the neobaroque in the following: in Classicism, the empty space between elements is as important as the elements itself. The element delineates the empty spaces between them. (Carpentier: 338) To the Classicist variation of empty spaces and filled spaces in architecture Carpentier opposes Baroque architecture, which is characterized by the *horror vacui*, fear of the empty space, the proliferation fills everything with no apparent symmetry. There is a sense of urgency, a sense of naturalness in this proliferation, it is happenstance, a reflection of the way a signifying chain erupts in the human consciousness. There is a contradiction here, as in the introduction of this chapter there was an argument against the *natural* essence of the baroque. Insofar as the human being is a part of *nature*, the neurological and cerebral process of signification is a natural process. Yet, everything produced by that process is artificial. This is a matter of further philosophy and will not be delved into now.

Sarduy develops this idea much further by not emphasizing the idea of space at all, nor does he give an opinion or a comparison with the Classicist.

For Sarduy, the *horror vacui* manifests in a different way, based on the Lacanian *objet petit a*, *objet (a)*. Sarduy is more interested in what the space *does* than how it is created. The direct consequence of *horror vacui* are the baroque substitution (*sustitución barroca*), and the baroque proliferation (*proliferación barroca*), two neobaroque poetic processes described by Sarduy in *El barroco y el neobarroco* (Sarduy 1999: 1387–1391).

Substitution occurs when the signifier has disappeared and been replaced by another, completely semantically distant from the first, and it only corresponds to the first signifier in the signifying process under the conditions of the *erotic* (in a Sarduyan sense – disobedient, wild) context of the story. The example Sarduy gives is from Lezama Lima, who calls the male organ “a skinny protuberance of a macrogenitome” which in the context of the story presents the reader with an unusual distance between the signifier and the signified, a gap, a space between the two, which allows for a multitude of new signifying chains to erupt, like fireworks. Sarduy also refers to this example in the novel *Colibrí*, by presenting his own version – “the protuberant crotch of the big bird”<sup>24</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 733). This reference is only visible when the reader is also familiar with *The Baroque and the Neobaroque*.

The process of proliferation can be expressed in the usage of unusual symbols and epithets, by exchanging words in common phrases, creating an effect of alienation. Yet this comes with a *caveat*, the operant part of the image must be sufficiently distant from the intended referent, otherwise it fails to create a discernible fertile germinating nucleus to be conveyed as neobaroque.

Here it must be underlined that neobaroque, like all other aesthetic movements, is not a division with sharp edges. It is a specific density on a scale, and the edges of it are not clear, they are gradual, fuzzy. The same goes for the baroque image. It cannot be objectively measured, what is the germinating nucleus that catches the reader within the filigree and creates *jouissance*-filled experience. Yet it should be sufficiently unheard of, the author has had to insert this unusualness on purpose, and the purposefulness should be sensible. To test that – the sensitivity to oddness in literature and if these markers are, in fact, universal, in 2012 I executed a small experiment with my peers. Presenting them with an excerpt from Gabriel García Márquez’ novel *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, I asked them to point out the *punctum*, which is a term from Roland Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*. Though this text focuses on photography, Barthes is in fact describing the *punctum* in a way similar to that which the germinating nucleus is understood in the current work. It is the unusual signifier, which allows the signifying chain to erupt, to create additional

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<sup>24</sup> “la protuberante entrepierna del pajarraco” (Sarduy 1999: 733)

meaning. Yet, the experiment proved – the *punctums*, the germinating nuclei are not universal. None of the test subjects pointed out the same elements of the texts, in addition to that, they chose elements of different levels of the text, some focusing on single words, some on the phrases, some on the whole excerpt thematically. Therefore, it must be concluded that a neobaroque reading is always a hermeneutical reading of one person. Yet it is valid to say there are certain texts, which present more possibilities for these *punctums*, the germinating nuclei that spark signifying chains, just because there are odd and unusual signifiers, which call for an interpretation. Such as the neobaroque text, where the possibility of interpretation is especially present, in addition to occurring in extremely high concentrations.

The proliferation of elements fills all of the space and wants to leave the page seeping into every other text that tries to interpret it, including the one at hand.

Here I find it necessary to point out, which Carpentier fails to mention, and Sarduy does not find necessary, that although the page is filled with a multitude of elements, so much so, that there is no space *visible*, overflowing with its overabundance, there is, necessarily(!) a space in the neobaroque as well. The space is difficult to spot due to the fact it is, for the lack of a better term, smaller. Yet this “smaller” space, the void, still offers infinite space within the (*a*), the blind centre of the ellipse, the space of the signified. Returning to Lacan, we cannot ever reach the signified, we can only approach it liminally. In mathematics, any function can approach *e.g.* an axis of the coordinate plane liminally infinitely, yet never touching it. There will always be a space, however minute, between the function and the destination, it so desperately is trying to reach, and the substituted signifiers will thus *trace the outline of the signified*.

Proliferation is the process where the signifier is destroyed and replaced with a signifying chain, which progresses metonymically and which finally circumwrites the absent signified (Sarduy 1999: 1389). Lists in the neobaroque text usually represent the process of proliferation. This is not a simple accumulation, but an accumulation with tension, to repeat the already mentioned quote by Lezama Lima. The signifiers in the signifying chain are connected, however loosely, by a tension. In addition to that, the process of substitution can interfere into the process of proliferation as well; some of the signifiers

can be baroque substitutions in their own right. Irleamar Chiampi has added: “Here presides the Gongorean model with its risky metaphors (à la “raudos torbellinos de Noruega”) which align with Kitsch, such is the grade of artifice that the occlusion of the real object produces. The metaphoric energy that Sarduy identifies in the historic Baroque is inverted into a type of *spectralization* of referents, to sustain the poetic base of the Neobaroque.”<sup>25</sup> (Chiampi 1994: 6) It seems Chiampi dislikes kitsch, yet Sarduy is a firm believer in parody, and the kitsch and camp of neobaroque will be expanded on in the chapter 2.5.

Language and art, of course are not as easy to measure as the categories used here suggest, and, drawing a Lacanian parallel, everyone searching for the (*a*) and never reaching it, will and do still communicate. Yet, all communication is in the end also impossible. So true understanding of a partner or a friend is ultimately impossible. Understanding will not reach the *essence* of things. Here it should be assured that the search for *objet (a)* is not a fight until death. It is perfectly possible, in fact, the only possibility, to live with the “almost at the essence”, otherwise the world would end, there would be no more necessity of representation or communication. It is the plutonic energy at work, never stopping, breaking down elements and melding them together, keeping the process flowing,

This is the unnerving quality of the neobaroque *horror vacui*, it creates small empty spaces that are not difficult to find, they exist within the other categories presented here, that due to the impossibility of (universal) understanding, offer an infinite number of interpretations, meanings, an explosion.

On the other hand, the Classicist space really seems to be an empty space, a pause, there is no ulterior motive, no tension in it. It is just empty and its only function is to be around elements so there would be more *air*.

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<sup>25</sup> “Preside aquí el modelo gongorino con sus metáforas de riesgo (del tipo de «raudos torbellinos de Noruega»), que lindan con el Kitsch, tal es el grado de artificio que produce la oclusión del objeto real. La energía metafórica que Sarduy identifica en el barroco histórico se invierte en esa especie de «espectralización» de los referentes, para sostener la base poética del neobarroco.” (Chiampi 1994: 6)

## 2.4. Anamorphosis of the circle

Sarduy was most certainly influenced by Hans Holbein's famous painting *The Ambassadors* (1533), when writing the essay *Barroco* (1974), as this painting is the most famous work of its kind, featuring a fully anamorphous object, a skull in the forefront, which can only be seen correctly when standing on the far left of the picture. Sarduy focuses on Holbein and the anamorphosis in art further in the sub-chapter *Anamorfosis* of *Simulación* (1983).

The *retombée* that is the premise of this essay is the idea that the cosmology, the convictions about what the universe *looks like*, also influence the symbolic production, *i.e.* artistic production of an era (Sarduy 1999: 1197). The science of an era reflects and causes the artistic production at the same time. It has to be reminded that *Barroco* is written during the epoch when Sarduy still believed representation as such is possible, in his later years he did revise that opinion. This point is further developed in *Simulación*.

The revolution of the historical Baroque comes with the discoveries of Johannes Kepler. Kepler posited the notion that the Earth's trajectory around the Sun is not a perfect circle, but an *ellipse*. Even years after making his discoveries he himself tried to deny and debunk them himself, so strong were the theological implications of the geocentric world view that disqualifying it felt like heresy. Sarduy connects that to the Lacanian psychoanalysis that strongly echoes in so many of his terms. As a result of the anamorphosis of the circle, turning the circle on its side slightly, so to the viewer it looks like an ellipse, "Something is decentering itself, or rather, duplicating, dividing its center; now, the dominant figure is not the circle, with its single, radiating, luminous, paternal center, but the ellipse, which opposes this visible focal point with another, equally functional, equally real, albeit closed off, dead, nocturnal, the blind center, the other side of the Sun's germinating yang, that which is absent." (Sarduy 2010: 292) The ellipse shall be the germinating image for the conception of the poetic device of decentring. This was reflected in the human culture by the changing of *e.g.* city layouts, the baroque city does not have a traditional centre any more, as do most big European cities, with the town radiating out. Most Latin American big cities are built like a grid, with several centres (germinating nuclei). The application of the process of decentring to the text gives us the

*ellipsis*, poetic omission. This is the opposite process to substitution, which superimposes new and marvellous signifiers, the ellipsis then leaves something out, on purpose, as a poetic device. This seems unusual in the neobaroque and its over-signifying tendencies, but the absence of an element from a place where our cultural memory is saying it should be, can be very notable, and carry a strong meaning. The blind signifier may be found on higher levels of text, the phrase, the chapter, the full textual plane. The plot of novels is often confusing, if not absent altogether (Sarduy's *Cobra*). Missing are an expected ending, logic of the text. A good example of that is José Lezama Lima's novel *Paradiso*. This novel's plot is intricately confusing, as it is constructed like a baroque flow of consciousness. The plot jumps freely between different times and places, without much explanation. Yet all of the "jumps" seem to be motivated, stem from the signifying chains within the text. It is as if the author, while writing a fragment, was reminded of a different occasion, and starts writing about that, sometimes returning to the story that was interrupted, sometimes not. For example, in *Paradiso*, the protagonist José Cemi (a character clearly and purposefully inspired by Lezama Lima himself) is caught drawing on the wall with a chalk next to his school. He is dragged by street urchins inside of the barracks of Vedado, where live the people who are connected to the military base where José Cemi's father, the Colonel, works. What follows is four pages worth of description of the barracks and all of the colourful characters that live there. Then the story vies off to a description of the Colonel's trip to Jamaica. What happens to Cemi in relation to the drawing, or does anything happen at all, is not touched upon, the story never returns to it. Yet, every single one of the characters is described in length. All of their stories in turn serve as platforms for further elaborations in filigree. This is another characteristic I propose here. The neobaroque image is a *fractalesque* image. As in a fractal, the image contains structural copies of itself and those more copies of the whole on their turn. Thus, a single word can theoretically mirror the whole text. As will be exemplified further in the neobaroque reading of Sarduy's *Colibrí*, there is an unusual amount of epithets in the texts, both Lezama Lima and Sarduy present this characteristic, as well as Carpentier, but on a smaller scale. The unusual combinations of epithets and substantives suggest that the texture of the text might also be motivated from within, in order to create the fractals. For example, in *Paradiso*, Tránquilo, one of Mamita's sons is working on cleaning the



chandelier of the Colonel's house. "Crujió la escalera que enarbolaraba el vigor ecuestre de Tránquilo."<sup>26</sup> (Lezama Lima 1980: 137). The sentence seems an easy one, yet it is a fractal in its own right. The germinating nuclei here are the words *escalera* (stepladder), *enarbolar* (hoist, hold up), *ecuestre* (equestrian). Tránquilo is a famous horse tamer; the following two pages are dedicated to a rant by Captain Viole, who accuses Tránquilo of all sorts of sorcery regarding the horses, drawing a parallel to the possible seduction of his sister Luba. This is foreshadowed and repeated by always using epithets that are connected to equestry with the name Tránquilo. The word *enarbolar* is quite an unusual one, carrying connotations with hoisting a flag, climbing up a tree (*árbol* – tree in Spanish). The word *escalera* goes very well with the two remaining, due to the alliteration. There is a metonymic relationship between the words *escalera* (stepladder) and *enarbolar* (to hoist). This sentence on its turn reflects in the paragraph where all of the relationships between characters are somehow metonymically motivated, by their names.

This can be compared to the way epithets are used in the *Iliad*, for example. The Homeric style of using epithets is well-known and documented – “rosy-fingered” dawn or “swift-footed” Achilles. Yet, the *Iliad* is written in strict verse and oftentimes the usage of these epithets is explained by the necessity of following the dactylic hexameter. The other explanation given to the excessive use of epithets in the *Iliad* is the necessity of memorising the text and reminding the listener (as this is considered an oral text in its inception) of the character that is on the stage. Almost all of the example texts used in this work are prose, why then, these unusual epithets?

As I have already signalled previously, this might be due to the strong rhythmic considerations that the texts present. In other words, the poetics is strongly over-codified, including the usage of *rhythm* in the prose, in fact drawing from poetry on purpose. The other possible explanation of the overuse of epithets might actually coincide with the *Iliad*'s reason – in order to memorize characters (and to stress the fact consciously, that there are a multitude of characters). *Paradiso*, as so many core texts of Latin America, is a vast family epic, spanning back three generations from José Cemi, and over almost a

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<sup>26</sup> “The stepladder which held Tránquilo's equestrian vigor creaked” (Lezama Lima 1988: 26)

century. This and Lezama Lima's proliferating style results in a vast array of characters, some of which are just mentioned in passing. The over-codification of the names is one of the key examples of *fractals* in the example texts. As will be demonstrated in the following, Severo Sarduy in fact develops the process of fractalization even further by leaving aside proper names and turning to symbols instead of epithets and names. This is the ultimate anamorphosis – the *name* of the character is omitted, the signified which is considered so necessary in the Western world, the true *essence* of a human being, is omitted and replaced by a metonymical signifying chain of epithets and symbols.

## 2.5. Parody

Sarduy has taken as the basis of the process of parody Mikhail Bakhtin's definitions of parody and the carnivalesque: "parody derives from the ancient "serio-comic genre related to carnivalesque folklore – hence its mixture of gaiety and tradition – and utilizes contemporary speech seriously; but it also freely invents, plays with a plurality of tones, that is, speaks about speech. /---/ Carnivalization implies parody to the extent that it is equivalent to confusion and confrontation." (Sarduy 2010: 280)

It is crucially important, that the texts that have been introduced and analysed in this thesis, be not taken at face value. Whether it be the obscure images, references, plutonist images, tension between ludicrously different words, language, etc. The baroque was, and has always been, a discourse of laughter and humour. The process of parody is an intrinsic part of the baroque since its historic inception. Bakhtin has created the term *carnivalesque* around the Baroque French writer Rabelais and his creation of *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. He underlines the importance of laughter and the carnival in the book *Rabelais and his world* (1984) constantly.

The parody in Severo Sarduy is always closely connected to *camp*<sup>27</sup> and *kitsch*<sup>28</sup>. The knowledge he carried of the gay culture, the popular culture of the LGBT community, the

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<sup>27</sup> Behaving and dressing in a way that some people think is typical of a gay man, OR using bright colours, loud sounds, unusual behaviour, etc. in a humorous way. (Cambridge English Dictionary)

<sup>28</sup> Art, decorative objects, or design considered by many people to be ugly, without style, or false but enjoyed by other people, often because they are funny. (Cambridge English Dictionary)

possibility of a fluid gender, was exceptional during the 80s and 90s. I would like to quote Allen Young here once more, as he has really *got* the essence of neobaroque, which is, as he says “a willingness to convert a most rancid tradition into a throbbing sign of modernity” (Young 2013: 1). Not only is the *rancid* tradition here the historical Baroque, it is the orientalism in the spirit of Wilde, the pornographic in the spirit of Sade, the pop culture of the 60s and 70s, the Cuban culture of isolation, etc. It is the courage and the brazenness to take advantage of the layers of culture deemed low, cheap, and rework them into an intricate baroque pattern that *can* be compared to the innovation of Kondori and other American syncretic artists of the early days of the Conquista. Baroque texts use the material (including language) freely, without shame. This also includes borrowing quotes, phrases, up to full phrases without quoting. It means turning genres on its head, verging on plagiarism. The confrontation present in the neobaroque stems from the fact that it goes *against* the grain of the dominant. This is one of the aspects Carpentier has used the most, the baroque as *counter-conquest*, as *revolution*. The baroque *does* imply a certain amount of resistance, as Bakhtin states, and so do all the three Cubans. The medieval and early modern carnivals were a tool to oppose the harsh reign of the church and the nobility. The carnival masque allows for a different freedom.

I have to stress that parody as such is not a characteristic solely reserved for the neobaroque. Yet it has to be intrinsically a part of the text’s structure, the parody has to be readable on all strata. Sarduy also stresses that in *The Baroque and the Neobaroque*: “Of course, the work will be properly Baroque to the extent that these elements, synonymic supplement, parody, and so on – are found situated at the nodal points of the structure of the discourse<sup>29</sup>, that is, to the extent that they guide their development and proliferation. Hence the need to distinguish between works on whose surface float fragments, minimal units of parody, as a decorative element, and works belonging specifically to the parodic genre and whose entire structure is constituted, generated, by the principle of parody, by the sense of carnivalization.” (Sarduy 2010: 281)

For example, Sarduy’s collection of poetry, *Big Bang* (1973), which was previously

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<sup>29</sup> Note that Sarduy also gets to the idea that the nodal points, germinating nuclei, can be found on different strata of the text, not just in *e.g.* syntax.

introduced in chapter 2.2, is a very unusual publication, as this is a continuation or an *exemplification* of the 1972 essay *Barroco*. Sarduy has created a neobaroque artistic text to exemplify (or parody) his own essayistic texts. The parody, besides the commentary in the language and vocabulary, lies also in the form of the collection. The texts X and XI are actually schematics explaining the movement and development of the *blue scraggler* stars. There is no additional explanation. In that, the traditional form of a poetry collection has been mocked, in fact, the traditional form of poetry itself. For example. The collection ends with a list of references to scientific publication.

From what has been previously presented, it is quite a natural step to state that metafiction is one of the parodic processes that appear in neobaroque and thus has been treated as a sub-process of parody. Metafiction is a problematic term to be appropriating for the neobaroque, especially in the light of the postmodernist discourse. Let there be a short introduction into how the relationship between the neobaroque and postmodernism has been dealt with.

Brian McHale has positioned the Latin American post-Boom in relation to postmodernism: “Clearly, Latin America constitutes another postmodernist *topos*, a favored zone. Just as clearly, however, the historical conditions of Latin-American postmodernism differ radically from those in North America. The frontier experience has not left nearly as deep a mark on the conceptualization of Latin-American space as it did in North America; nor has Latin America yet joined the ontological landscape of advanced industrial society (described in the preceding chapter) as fully as the United States has. We must look elsewhere for the formative conditions of the Latin-American zone.” (McHale 1987: 51). Even McHale can see that there is something *ontologically* different about the *postmodernist* writings in Latin America, that the postmodernist conceptualization has not taken root there as strongly. I hope this thesis has shown that this anomaly was caused by the fact that in the end of the 80s, all Latin America was conceptualized with the help of the baroque. In addition, yes, the formative conditions of the Latin American literature in the end of the 20th century should be looked for in the baroque. Yet he does not even mention the word *baroque* in the volume. This just goes to show, how the century-old discussion on the baroque in 1987 was still relatively

isolated to Latin America, as was signalled in the beginning of this thesis, referring to Lois Parkinson Zamora and Monika Kaup. McHale positions the post-Boom firmly into the postmodern situation, yet there are several authors, who position it very differently. Chiampi, though having speaking on the relations of modernism/postmodernism and the *Baroque* on several occasions, always excludes the neobaroque from those, or places it on the edge, so it is a parallel movement, or a support to the postmodernist debate, a separate category that cannot be equated with postmodernism, or an in-between, a link, a connection and a separator at the same time.

“Without using the term “postmodern”, which in the 70s was still not in circulation in Latin America, Sarduy anticipates diverse speculations concerning the aesthetic regimen of postmodernism, /---/ From that point of view, the neobaroque escapes the aesthetic canon of the modernity, for reasons that Sarduy elaborates on in his essay [*El barroco y el neobarroco*], especially when he explains how the artificialization and the parody “expose” the codes of the modern, to empty those and reveal those as the artefacts that aspire to create the meaning.”<sup>30</sup> (Chiampi 1994: 8)

McHale, in order to assuage the unease about the Latin American postmodernism, offers as a characteristic of it the *plurality of words*. Using as examples Cortazar’s *Hopscotch* (1963) and Carlos Fuentes’ *Terra nostra* (1975), he posits:

“Once the unity of the fictional ontology has been split, further splittings-off follow; duality of the fictional world gives rise, by a kind of chain reaction, to a plurality of worlds. Thus, the third “panel” in both *Hopscotch* and *Terra nostra* belongs to neither Europe nor Latin America, but breaks up into multiple worlds. In *Hopscotch*, this “pluralization” affects mainly narrative structure, which dissolves into a collection of heterogeneous “expendable chapters,” including citations from other texts, metafictional reflections on the nature of the novel, and narrative episodes “lost” from the main story. In *Terra nostra*, however, this pluralization is genuinely ontological: a plurality of

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<sup>30</sup> “Sin utilizar el término «postmoderno», que en los años 70 no estaba todavía en circulación en América Latina, Sarduy anticipa diversas especulaciones sobre el régimen estético del postmodernismo, /---/ Visto así, el neobarroco escapa al canon estético de la modernidad, por razones que Sarduy teje en filigrana en su ensayo, especialmente cuando explica cómo la artificialización y la parodia «exponen» los códigos de lo moderno, para vaciarlos y revelarlos como artefacto que aspira a producir el sentido.” (Chiampi 1994: 8)

worlds.” (McHale 1987: 52) This is a revelatory quote, as there are signs of McHale trying to further the postcolonial agenda once more, the question of *belonging*, which has previously been rejected in the construction of the current poetics. Yet there is also a point concerning the metafictional elements so apparent in the works of the Latin American neobaroque writers. McHale stresses the *plurality* of possible worlds in these texts, and most importantly, the appearance of the metafiction and the pluralization on *different levels of text*. As posited in the beginning of this chapter, the aim is to search for the poetic processes on *all levels, all strata* of text. Therefore, it is to be noted that the metafiction appears on a purely linguistic level – the meticulous usage of *different* vocabulary, of avoiding word repetition vs the occasional distinct usage of repetition; the overabundant and strange use of epithets and alliteration – these draw the user’s attention to the *artificiality* of the text, the *labour of the artist*, make the text feel more like *poetry*, like a *bliss text*, thus immediately posing the question of genre and form. Sarduy summarizes this idea in *The Baroque and the Neobaroque*, based on Lacan: “The Word, squandered forms, language that because of its excessive abundance no longer designates things but only other designators of things, signifiers enveloping itself, revealing its own grammar, the models of that grammar and its generation in the universe of words.” (Sarduy 2010: 281)

Metafiction can also be noted on a more *traditional* level, the narrator comments on the fact that this is a text that is artificial, addresses the reader, becomes unreliable, etc. This can be observed in Lezama Lima’s *Paradiso*, as well as most of Sarduy’s novels, but especially *Colibrí*.

### 3. A Neobaroque Reading of Severo Sarduy's novel *Colibrí* (1984)

The novel *Colibrí*, published in 1984, is last of the *de facto* trilogy that is composed of three novels – *Cobra* (1972), *Maitreya* (1978) and *Colibrí*, the one that deals the most with the problem of language, text and *jouissance*. We have to bear in mind that at the moment of *Colibrí*'s publication, it had been 10 years since the publication of the essay *Barroco* and Sarduy's post-structuralist views had only intensified. He is unsure of the possibility of any kind of transition of meaning. Adriana Méndez Rodenas calls it a fight to the death between the *text-simulacrum* and the *realistic text*, as its opposite, not to be confused with Realism, it is the text that can be read and interpreted. (Méndez Rodenas 1985: 399). This novel is the most extreme as to its poetic expression: the images, the poetic devices used are so abundant, in such high concentrations on the pages, that it begs an investigation.

By leaning on the interpretations of the previous chapter, the text will be read and a selection of the examples of previously extrapolated poetic devices will be presented with commentary. Not all, by far, as this would require a multi-volume publication. Yet, *Colibrí* is a short novel, merely a hundred pages. That shows the density of the Gongora-worthy work Sarduy has poured into it.

The story is simple, although scandalous and almost ludicrous:

The blonde Colibrí, a beautiful young man, arrives at a shabby brothel in a small town on a Caribbean river, where every night there are sadomasochistic fight performances organized between young men. He is pitted against a huge Japanese karate fighter, and manages to escape a beating and forced intercourse. They flee from the bar with the Japanese and hide in the jungle. The Regent of the brothel, a woman (most probably a transvestite) obsessed with Colibrí, sends her henchmen to retrieve the runaways. Eventually, and with intricate schemes of narcotics and deception, they succeed in

returning Colibrí to the “Mansion”, as the brothel is dubbed in the novel. This escape and retrieval is repeated twice more. The movements are intersected by various unexpected digressions into several hallucinatory spaces and activities (e.g. a shop that produces painted and costumed fleas). In the end, Colibrí burns down the Mansion and becomes the new Chief. The last phrase of the novel reinforces the self-referentiality and artificiality of the novel by creating a circular ending for the story, it finishes where it started: “We have to put up a good coating of red plaster. And lamps. Let’s see if two or three youngsters from the estuary are brought here to dance a little, if this will become livelier.”<sup>31</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 795)

This caricature of a plot, although taking a background role in relation to the poetics of the novel, can be interpreted as a parody of a traditional fairy tale plot, where there is something very desirable, and the antagonist tries to retrieve it at all costs, which leads to repeating motifs (usually three). In the end, the protagonist is saved from their pursuer and takes the role of the tormentor. The best example might be Snow White.

### 3.1. *Plutonism*

Sarduy in *Colibrí* does not present the reader with an array of portmanteaus or other composite word-plays. Yet the plutonistic process is well represented by the deliberate use of homonyms or homonym-like words in the text and signifiers that have been cut loose from their usual significations. For example, when the Japanese and the Gigantito are fighting or partaking in a sexual act, the Gigantito is at the same time cutting the Japanese with the *lignus crucis* (a crucifix-weapon that contains a knife and a corkscrew) and licking his skin and his breasts. “The big white Bull, at the same time being caramelized by the linguistic flatteries,”<sup>32</sup> (p. 741). Here, the word *linguistic* has re-appropriated some of the metonymic ground it has lost during the 20th century, as the main reference in this case is the *tongue* that is licking. Nevertheless, the word retains its connotation to the linguistic enquiry, thus becoming an undividable image, a germinating

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<sup>31</sup> “Hay que dar una buena lechada roja. Y poner lámparas. A ver si traen dos o tres muchachones del estuario, que bailen un poco, para que animen esto.” (Sarduy 1999: 795)

<sup>32</sup> “El Toro blancote, a la vez acaramelado por los halagos lingüísticos,” (p. 741)



nucleus for a further signifying chain. It is noticeable that this image is associated closely with the *lignus crucis*, because of the similarity between the words, creating another dimension of word play.

Another example of homonyms stems from the usage of Caribbean slang terms, many of which are common Spanish words that have metonymically acquired a different meaning. For example – *balance* (rocking chair, commonly balance, p. 754); the phrase *cantar el manicero* (commonly peanut vendor, in Cuba colloquial for dying, *el Manicero* – famous Cuban song, known for being the last song in a concert often, p. 755), *floripondio* (commonly pansy, homosexual in the Americas, p. 758), *ballú* (bayou, in Cuba – a place of indecencies, p. 759), *gandinga* (commonly apathy, in Cuba shame, p. 763). Alternatively, he recreates and modifies words with the help of grammatical derivation, for example *pulgatorio* (*pulga* – flea, compare *purgatorio*, p. 726), *mezzanine despajado* (mezzanine emptied of birds, p. 757), when Colibrí had escaped the mezzanine once again, *aconejado* (rabbit-like, fearful, p. 759).

Another plutonistic grammatical derivation is Sarduy's persistent mixing of diminutives and augmentatives into oxymorons, and the overwhelming usage of diminutives and augmentatives in general – *tufillo* (stenchie, p. 757), *zapatones* (large shoes, p. 759), *frivolón* (superficial, p. 763). This creates a very informal tone in the sentence. Yet, these grammatical categories are usually juxtaposed with technical terminology, borrowed foreign words, therefore, vocabulary of a contrasting register, which causes tension, for example *tufillo recalcitrante* (recalcitrant stenchie, p. 757). This process will be further investigated in the following chapter.

More mixing of augmentatives and diminutives is very apparent in the fact that two of the main characters in the text are *el Gigantito* (literally *the Mini-Giant*) and *la Enanota* (*Mega-Dwarf*). The oxymoron is composed of different strata of language, a word and a grammatical category, which carries a meaning. Sarduy himself also stresses it in the beginning of the novel: “A big-headed Mini-Giant, the double and anamorphosis of the dwarf,”<sup>33</sup> (p. 695). Therefore, the two characters are actually two sides of the same

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<sup>33</sup> “Un Gigantito cabezón, doble y anamorfosis de la enana,” (p. 695)

concept, the plutonist image. With this move, Sarduy also brings to light the fact that meaning can be conveyed by the smallest elements of language. Which makes it a metafictional image at the same time. The names are a juxtaposition of the *big* and *small* categories, resulting in *punctums* that catch the eye immediately. So the Enanota and the Gigantito might be small or large, this is not specified in the novel. This also shows that many of the tricks used might not have any other purpose than to create the neobaroque texture of the novel. The Japanese, on the other hand, is always big. The usage of symbols instead of character names will be further described in the chapter 2.3, but the Japanese also receives the radial names *el Nikon* and *el Toyotón* (p. 739), which are derived from the Japanese enterprises, Nikon and Toyota. The addition of the augmentative suffix *-ón* creates the plutonistic image. With this usage of the augmentative and diminutive grammatical categories Sarduy also directs attention to the fact that this kind of derivation is oftentimes used in Spanish to create subtle changes in meaning. The differentiation between the already existing derivations and new ones, and the confusion between those two is a task that the reader is presented with.

Thus, Sarduy's plutonistic strategy in *Colibrí* is very subtle. Instead of creating over-the-top portmanteaus, as in Cabrera Infante, he is operating with already existing words, and almost surgically removing them from their everyday meaning, creating a question between the signifier and the signified, a void where the real resides. These plutonist images are difficult to spot, as they might be easily overlooked. Yet when reading in filigree as suggested in chapter 2.1, these *edges* (Barthes) should start provoking the reader.

### **3.2. Tension**

*Colibrí* is a grand web of contradictions and connections. The process of tension creates images that are odd, where the signifier is at a considerable distance from the signified, *points de capiton*, edges, germinating nuclei.

On a higher level of the text, the tension is caused by mixing different tones and styles of text, as in the example offered from *Big Bang* in 2.2. However, this kind of contrasts can

also be found on a syntactic level. For example: *víctima tetanizada por la química del mimicry-dress-art* (the tetanized victim of the *mimicry-dress-art* chemistry, p. 732). The elements of this phrase have such different backgrounds, the *tetanizada* – a neologistic derivative of the disease *tetanus*, *mimicry-dress-art* is a combination of words, the usage of which brings to mind the constellations of words in the last poem of Big Bang. The chemistry refers to the art of painting fleas, transforming them into different characters (a bride, a firefighter, etc.); the image only comes to exist fully in the reading process, which makes it an anamorphous image.

The unexpected combinations of epithets and substantives serve a self-referential end as well, as shown in the chapter 2.2 and 3.3. Curiously, in these cases we are usually not dealing with oxymorons as exemplified in the previous chapter by the characters' symbol-names, in the sense that the epithets are uncommon and the combinations unheard of, yet they are not diametrically opposite to each other. For example – *alimaña saltadora*, *saltamontes cojo*, *grillo maromero* (vermin-pole vaulter, lame grasshopper, cricket-acrobat, p.731). The adjectivized epithets-substantives are from entirely different backgrounds, yet here a curious twist is used by Sarduy – the three substantives and the three adjectives are actually connected to each other, corresponding to constellations *small animals – athletic form*. As a result, these three images can be considered repetition. None of these tendencies is absolute in *Colibrí*, as an exception to the rule can always be found. There are also a few oxymoronic phrases, like *una esponja de cemento* (a cement sponge, p. 735), *tenue explosion* (faint explosion, p. 761).

Sarduy himself laughs metafictionally at the proliferation of adjectives he uses in *Colibrí* – “No encuentro el adjetivo.” (I cannot find the adjective, p. 744) – the only place where he cannot!

Another device used to emphasize the contrasts within the text is the quite frequent use of quotes from different foreign languages: *puce à l'oreille* (p. 725), *double bind* (p. 741), *défroque* (p. 741), *boudoir* (p. 755), *believe it or not* (p. 755), *tutti-frutti hat* (p. 759), *pas de trois* (p. 760). In the phrase *los fans del Feroz* (the fans of the Ferocious, p. 698), the foreign term is only used to achieve the alliteration.

There can also be several logical contradictions brought out. The most frequent is the dubbing of the *Japonesón*, the *Big Japanese*, as a *karateka* (e.g. 734). The description of the Japanese is as follows: “If not from a Colombian Rubensian brothel of the last years of the forties, he originated from a combat school of feigned morals, which was sustained by troublemaker-titans of the rainy afternoons of the sports dynasties, in the twilight of the Nippon Empire. He had oiled his skin painstakingly and gathered the hair, lacquered black, into an authoritarian and pyramidal bun, composed of three overlapping spheres, like a Monte Meru.”<sup>34</sup> (p. 696). The description is quite clearly that of a sumo wrestler, he is naked, with a black bun, and enormous, yet everywhere in the book, he is referred to as a *karateka*. As is revealed later, he is also extremely fast, like a *karateka*. Sarduy spent years travelling in Asia, he was very knowledgeable about the Asian cultures – if the reader has any doubt, in the same quote there is a reference to the Monte Meru, a sacred mountain, which in Hindu religion is considered the centre of all the physical, metaphysical and spiritual universes, proving that Sarduy has not made a mere mistake here. He deliberately and brazenly mixes signifiers of different cultural backgrounds, to achieve the effect of fragmentation, confusion, confrontation. These contradictions are once more designed to capture the reader, to slow them down, these are neon signs pointing to the text – *This is artifice!*

In the second chapter, *Guerra de las escrituras* (War of the *écritures*, p. 721–730), the narrator keeps changing his mind, how many old people (one is actually a woman) work there in the flea shop. First, he says: *Sí, pretendían los viejos entalcados* (Yes, the talky oldies pretended, p. 722), *concentraban los tres* (the three concentrated, p. 724), *el viejo se había refugiado* (the oldie had escaped, p. 729) Sometimes it seems there are many, sometimes just one, two or three. The pronouns and verb forms serve as the carriers of this confusion. This is further deepened by a character called *Manuscrito* (Manuscript) coming to the stage. At first glance it seems that in the flea painting shop, where there are

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<sup>34</sup> “Si no de un arrubensado burdel colombiano, en las postrimerías de los cuarenta, derivaba de la escuela de lucha de amago morales que alimentó de titanes picapleitos los mediodías lloviznados de los dinastías deportivos, en el crepúsculo del imperio nipón. Se había aceitado con esmero la piel y recogido el pelo, negro laqueado, en un moño autoritario y piramidal, de tres esferas superpuestas, como un Monte Meru.” (p. 696)

hundreds of piles of newspapers and all sorts of things laying around, there might be a manuscript or two, but one of the old people is actually referred to as Manuscript, as next *el Manuscrito* hikes up his pants. Yet, in a neobaroque text such as this, where the reader is already anticipating a metafictional cut, a *punctum*, it is easy to imagine that the Manuscript speaking is the book at hand. More on metafiction in the chapter 2.5.

### 3.3. *Horror vacui*

“The “whales” – the randy and solvent antediluvians who, when the night had arrived, saturated or horny, repaired their hull in the local,”<sup>35</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 693)

Here Sarduy starts the symbol for the visitors of the bar – whales. The visitors are almost always called something different, every time the circle of signifiers is amplified, and the meaning in the centre of the void, the signified is thus liminally approached, might be that the best denotative signified here is the *petrolero*, but that is not required in my reading, thus we are only going to look at the amplitude of the proliferation. The poetic device used here might be called a symbol, most accurately a constellation of symbols, as all of the elements are synonyms. He goes on: “the other marine monsters – distributor-dolphins, scammer-shark, ubiquitous and agitated tuna,”<sup>36</sup> (Sarduy 1999: 695). The alliterated phrases make this another spot of double codification: *delfines distribuidores*, *tiburones traficantes*. The proliferation of this image is carried on through the whole novel: abyssal fish (ibid. 698) husky oppressors (ibid. 698), morbid *moby dicks* (ibid. 699), marine pigs (ibid: 703), etc. These are the elements that try to fill the space of the “visitor”-sign with other elements that have a much bigger potential for proliferation. Thus, there is also a tension in the image *marine pigs*, combining unexpected signifiers like the sea and the pig; in the phrase morbid moby dicks, the use of alliteration creates another germinating nucleus for the signifying chains.

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<sup>35</sup> “Las “ballenas” - viejancos libidinosos y solventes que, ya entrada la noche, embebidos o cachondos, carenaban en el local,” (Sarduy 1999: 693)

<sup>36</sup> “otros monstruos marinos - delfines distribuidores, tiburones traficantes, ubicuas y alebretadas toninas” (Sarduy 1999: 695)

All of the characters are lacking a proper name, they are only referred to with the help of this constructed signifying chain, where in the void is their proper name, surrounded radially by the symbols. For example, Colibrí, the protagonist, the heading of the novel, is also a mere symbol, the Hummingbird. Several species of hummingbirds are native to Cuba; it has become a universal symbol of love in the Cuban culture. Some of the examples to illustrate the extent of this proliferation follow: the incredulous bird (*el pájaro incrédulo*, p. 731), the big narcotized bird (*el pajarón narcotizado*, p. 734) – note the use of the augmentative suffix, the gobsmacked Bird (*el Pájaro azorado*, p. 736) – note the usage of capitalization, the master of sugar (*el señor del azúcar*, p. 737) – the hummingbird eats nectar from flowers, the Defenestrator (*el Defenestrador*, p. 738) – when he jumps out of the window, *el zunzún* (literally, the buzz-buzz, p. 759). The adjectives that accompany the substitute depend often on the action that is going on in the novel – incredulous, narcotized, gobsmacked, the Defenestrator.

Another common representation of the baroque proliferation are the numerous lists of signifiers. Sarduy himself brings that out in *El barroco y el neobarroco*, though, quoting Carpentier: “to connote the signified *disorder*, he traces around the (absent) signified” (Sarduy 1999: 1389). This very Lacanian statement and its application is apparent in *Colibrí*. There are several lists very similar to the one he quotes, in *Colibrí*. Let there be one example: “The walls were adorned with macrocephalic monsters, ostrich eggs, fish-cats and foeti in formaldehyde; from the ceiling lamp, the Carmelite believed to glimpse dried snakes hanging, spiked wigs that were feigning to be mandrakes, a perfect gold sphere, an albino chameleon, an iguana with six feet but without lumps in the tail, and the right femur of Adam.”<sup>37</sup> (p. 734) Firstly, it should be noted that these element-images are not synonyms this time. The meaning, the void, the common denominator in my reading is metaphysics. Secondly, there are again a multitude of other poetic devices inserted into this sentence – alliterations (macrocephalic monsters, foeti in formaldehyde), an inversion of *catfish*, a symbol (the character Gigantona dressed as a nun – the Carmelite), etc. It has

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<sup>37</sup> “Los muros eran adornados con monstruos macrocéfalos, huevos de avestruz, peces-gato y fetos en formol; del plafón, creyó adivinar la carmelita, pendían culebras disecadas, pelucas erizadas que simulaban mandrágoras, una esfera de oro perfecta, un camaleón albino, una iguana de seis patas aunque sin nudos en el rabo, y el fémur derecho de Adán.” (p. 734)

to be reminded that these are just the first and most superficial significations. The text can be read and reread and more signifiers easily added to the reading. As in the experiment described previously in the chapter 2.3, every reader finds different *punctums*. These presented here have been purposefully chosen to represent the various poetic processes of the neobaroque text. Furthermore, to confuse the reader even more, and add possibilities for signification, there is also a commentary by the author's for the proliferating list, a footnote: "A "boudoir of miracles", described by Patrick Mauriès as the analogy of the "Baroque trinket". Browniana, Le Promeneur IX."<sup>38</sup> (p. 734) Firstly, Sarduy is offering a metafictional commentary on the aesthetics of his own novel; the *baroque trinket* is connected to the problems of morality he had already commented on in *Barroco*. Secondly, the man he is referring to —, Patrick Mauriès, is a former student of the *École normale supérieure de Saint-Cloud*, a generation younger than Sarduy himself, a journalist, editor, also acquainted to Barthes. The quote is from the periodical *Le Promeneur*, which Mauriès founded. More importantly, one of his main works is *le Second manifeste camp* (the Second Camp Manifest, 1979), which has been strongly influenced by Sarduy's work in Paris. The reference to Mauriès gives it the characteristic of a parodic process, as well.

In the previous quotes, one of the outstanding characteristics of *Colibrí* is immediately pronounced, almost comically so, the tendency of using epithets with almost all substantives. This trait is so conspicuous and draws so much attention, that it can be immediately qualified as a metafictional device. Such a marked usage of epithets brings the reader to the forefront of the text and forces them to acknowledge that the author is using these poetic devices commonly only seen in poetry, applies them to a prose piece, to emphasize that it is a piece of *artifice*, that it has very little to none to do with the physical world around us. This is even further emphasized by the anamorphous tendency of adjectivizing substantives and using adjectives on their own as the subject of the sentence. For example the page 702: the exhausted Regent (*la trajinada Regente*), elaborate domestic rituals (*los alambicados rituales domésticos*), the cetacean desire (*la avidez ballenera*), the arduous protocol (*el arduo protocolo*), interested presentations

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<sup>38</sup> "Un "cabinete de maravillas", descrito por Patrick Mauriès como analogía de la "quincalla barroca". Browniana, Le Promeneur IX" (p. 734)

(*presentaciones interesadas*), cunning amorous falconry (*taimada cetrería amorosa*), tasty little cakes (*apetitosos pastelitos*), naked warriors (*guerreros desnudos*), vast gods (*vastos dioses*), (*Sones montunos.*), etc. (not a complete list). It is noteworthy, that the last example is a full sentence consisting of an adjective and a substantive. This functions as an affirmation the metafictional strategy. It is not an accident that a sentence without a verb follows a proliferation-type list. More noteworthy is that there are many more examples on the page 702.

### **3.4. Anamorphosis of the circle**

The anamorphosis of the circle in Sarduy's theory is, as shown previously, the master trope of the historical Baroque. Although for Sarduy the master trope of the neobaroque is actually the Big Bang, the theory of the expansion of the universe, it does not exclude or delete the master trope of the ellipse, which arose already in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with Kepler. The ellipse is also present in neobaroque poetics, whether it be the ellipsis or any kind of decentring of a work of art. It is a quaint plot, a missing logic, an unusual usage of grammatical categories –, the essence of anamorphosis is a shift of emphasis, a shift in the reading process, as many anamorphous images only become visible in the reading, from a specific point of view, as in Holbein's painting.

There is a literal illustration of the anamorphosis within the novel. When Colibrí returns to the Mansion the second time and sees the house and its pathetic inhabitants, says: "yet, seen today, and from the side, as this world permits us to do, reduced to a negligible density of representation"<sup>39</sup>. The world, the text permits us to look at images from different positions, to create our own signifying chains, this is the message Sarduy wishes to convey. Neobaroque acknowledges the fact that nothing is permanent, especially so the signification of the world, which changes constantly, as Sarduy showed in *Barroco*.

This can be seen in the use of sole adjectives as the subject of a sentence, or adjectivized substantives – the grammar category is shifted. The curious use of symbols instead of

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<sup>39</sup> "pero que visto hoy y de lado – como lo permite ese mundo, reducido al ínfimo espesor de la representación," (p. 755).



character names also supports the creation of this effect. For example – *la envenenada* (the poisoned, p. 732) – the flea that had been slightly poisoned by the colours in the flea painting shop, *la Diabólica* (the Diabolic – the Regent, p. 769).

The fractalization of the images is also one of the consequences of the anamorphous process; it is illustrated by the image on the pages 735–736. “[The things] accumulate in the corners of the steps [of the spiral staircase, the seashell], to fall as sooty drizzle on the lower level”<sup>40</sup> (p.736) – the neobaroque image works in a similar manner, the higher levels affect the lower levels of text. Or, illustrated in “like holding in his hand, the sphere of the world, his personal centre of gravity”<sup>41</sup> (p. 738), a neobaroque image can *hold its own*, is readable without context, without the surrounding sentences, as has been done in this thesis, due to the fact that it contains a world of its own, and reading just the few images already gives an appropriate vision of the whole text.

In the subchapter *Regreso al país natal* a grand fractal is revealed, that of *burning* and the *heat rising*. The chapter starts with metafictional narrator threatening to burn the *leaves* (in Spanish *hoja* – page, leaf). This threat is carried into effect in the end of the chapter, where the narrator *burns* the previous pages the reader has just finished. The *hojas* also refers interchangeably to the hallucinogenic leaves that have been used in the Mansion. On a higher level of the whole text, the Mansion is burned and rebuilt on the ashes in the on the final pages (*hojas*). This symbolizes the cyclic nature of the novel once more. Within the chapter of the burning, there are smaller images within the text, for example the Regent reviving, as during the absence of Colibrí she had lost all will to live, had petered out. Now, when Colibrí returned, she ignites again (p. 759). Within the vocabulary a collection of metonymical elements can be found: *gestos eran apagados* (gestures were extinct, p. 756), *risibles saltapericos* (laughable firecrackers, p. 757), *de papel chamuscado* (of signed paper, p. 757), *ardor insoportable* (unbearable heat, p. 763).

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<sup>40</sup> “[las cosas] se acumulan en los rincones de los peldaños [de la escalera espiral, de caracola], para caer en llovizna tiznada hasta la planta baja” (p. 736).

<sup>41</sup> “como si llevara en la mano, esfera del mundo, su propio centro de gravedad.” (p. 738)

### 3.5. Parody

In my reading, the poetic process of parody can take many forms; all intertext is parody, references to different works of art, references to people, songs, popular culture, all work under the umbrella term of the Bakhtinian carnivalization, the parody. For example, there is a reference to Strauss' opera *El caballero de la rosa* (Der Rosenkavalier, p. 747), to the very popular Mexican soap opera in the 80s, *El derecho de nacer* (the right to be born, p. 746), a reference to Luis Buñuel – *la buñuelesca imagen* (the Buñuelesque image, p. 746), a reference to Divine's (a famous U.S. drag queen of 70s and 80s) song *Born to Be Cheap*, which also resolves the question if the Regent is a transvestite (*La Born to Be Cheap*, a symbol of the Regent, p. 770); the character *la Enana* (the Dwarf) escapes the Mansion and becomes a Hollywood actor called Hervé Villechaize, one of the most well-known antagonists in the Bond-series, who was a real person, making it a specifically metafictional image. However, the best intertext and one of the supporting pillars of *Colibrí* is the parody of the great *novela de la selva* (jungle novel) of Latin America. The comparison can be done based on motifs, the descriptions, or the whole text. Much of the aesthetics of the baroque theory in Latin America actually stem from the *novela de la selva*, and vice versa, Carpentier has written one of the pinnacles of the genre, *Los pasos perdidos*, on some level most certainly to illustrate his own attitudes towards the baroque. Some of the quintessential novels of the jungle are José E. Rivera's *La vorágine* (The Vortex, 1924, also mentioned on p. 776), Alejo Carpentier's *Los pasos perdidos* (The Lost Steps, 1953), Romulo Gallegos' *Doña Bárbara* (1929), Gabriel García Márquez' *Cien años de soledad* (100 Years of Solitude, 1967). For example, the Regent of the Mansion is based on the evil landowner Doña Bárbara, who kills and steals, and will not stop at anything to get what she wants. Both in *Doña Bárbara* as well as in *Colibrí*, the object of desire is a man. The episode of the Gigantito floating in the flea shop (p. 732) recalls one of the most memorable scenes from *100 years of solitude*, where the character Remedios la Bella ascends to the heavens a virgin. The river trip with the henchmen to take over the Mansion (p. 783) is a direct reference to the boat trip in *The Lost Steps*. Sarduy reuses the motifs in full, translating them into the neobaroque poetics, creating a deep familiarity in the text, yet alienating it in leaps and bounds with the language.

As delineated in the chapter 2.5, the metafictionality of a neobaroque novel can also be found in the usage of poetic devices themselves. Sarduy in *Colibrí* goes over the top with metafiction. The whole novel is a novel about writing and reading novels, about the loss of text, and the text being a simulacrum. As shown before, all elements refer to the same – *I am artifice, I am text, I fail to signify, thus I fill the void with signifiers*.

The alliterations are all at the same time other poetic devices – oxymorons, elements with tension, as well as signifiers with unusual epithets, as has been already investigated earlier. Yet the concentration and the bluntness of these alliterations is quite unexpected. To name a few: *pajarraco pata de perro* (big wandering bird – connotation to prostitution, p. 728), *madeja mojada* (wet head of hair, p. 728), *sapo salado* (salted toad, p. 731), *pulpo pinchado* (octopus on a stick, p. 732), *tan reservado rapto* (such a conservative kidnapping, p. 735), *la abigarrada arquitectura* (motley architecture, p. 738), *el moulage de dos manos que aferraban por las alas abiertas un águila* (a *moulage* of two hands that were clinging to the open wings of an eagle, p. 742), *faldón de fortuna* (big lucky skirt, p. 743), *atorante arroz con mango* (congealing mango rice p. 745), *marmitones manieristas* (manneristic scullions, p. 746), *chino de la charada* (a Chinese of the charades, p. 728), *cansancio clásico* (a Classical fatigue, p. 755), *arquitectura de alambra abollado* (architecture of dented wire mesh) etc. This is in no means a coincidence, and there is also a metafictional commentary on the usage of alliteration in the novel: *Tu zigzag por el zarzal – lo enredaba en la serpiente de la z* (Your zigzag along the bramble – he was entangled in the snake of the z, (p. 727). Another metafictional use of a poetic device is repetition: “Everyone with wet hair, smoking and smoking,”<sup>42</sup> (p. 736). This is especially notable as Sarduy avoids repeating words religiously. The usage of only adjectives and creating the proliferating nuclei is also one of the possible reasons for that. Moreover, reminding the *retombée*, the author is purposefully avoiding the repetition, which creates a double-codification in this point. (p. 736)

In addition to the aforementioned poetic types of metafiction, Sarduy also presents the reader with a traditional form of metafiction – the narrator addresses the reader directly. This process progresses during the novel. The narrator *steps on the stage* only in the

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<sup>42</sup> “Todas con pelo mojado, fumando y fumando.” (p. 736)

second quarter of the novel, suddenly asking the reader: “Who was it going to be? Tell me, after the Dwarf and her unsuccessful acolytes, if not her double and anamorphosis<sup>43</sup>? It’s clear. Everybody sees it. Everybody but the stupefied Colibrí, /---/. Yes, adored and clever readers [note the uses of the feminine form in Sanish – the implicit reader is a woman], it is him: the mini-Giant,”<sup>44</sup> (p. 733). In chapter three, *El robo del relato* (The Robbery of the Story) the characters that are chasing Colibrí, kidnap the story for several chapters, they give the reader false information (for example that the Gigantito and the Enanota are dead), incorrect descriptions. They “...have upset the backgrounds and the landscapes of the story, pulverized its precious unity of place, only to annoy me and maybe trap again, with such a malevolent ruse, the stunned and gullible Colibrí,”<sup>45</sup> (p. 746). The narrator complains: “I am fed up /---/ of the gross simulacrum that everyone here – even the narrator [note, female again, a transvestite?] of these pages –, I mean everyone manipulate,”<sup>46</sup> (p. 740). The narrator of the story is not omnipotent, he can be tricked, he cannot see all of the activity as his perception seems to be connected to that of Colibrí. For example – “Yes, I know; but I cannot give more details: Colibrí did not have time to perceive them,”<sup>47</sup> (p. 742); “But, where is the narrator of this alpine malicious lie, of this congealing mango rice? I am – they sent me to play in another part –,”<sup>48</sup> (p. 745). Tired of these metafictional antics, the poor narrator falls asleep on the page 747, and lets the characters do as they please. He only wakes up in the beginning of the next chapter to deal with his own son who needs his help. Thus, there is suddenly another level of the story, the story of the fat transvestite narrator, who is as affected by the narrative as the

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<sup>43</sup> Note the repetition of the symbol of Gigantito.

<sup>44</sup> “¿Quién iba a ser? ¿Quién, dime, después de la Enana y sus acolytas fracasadas, sino su doble y anamorfosis? Claro está. Todo el mundo lo ve. Todo el mundo, menos el alelado Colibrí, /---/. Si, adoradas y sagaces lectoras, es él: el Gigantito.” (p. 733)

<sup>45</sup> “han trastocado los fondos y paisajes del relato, pulverizando así su preciosa unidad de lugar, nada más que para sacarme de quicio y de paso volver a atrapar, con esa maligna artimaña, al turulato y crédulo Colibrí.” (p. 746)

<sup>46</sup> “Estoy hasta la coronilla /---/ de los groseros simulacros que aquí todos – hasta la terca narradora de estas páginas –, pero que todos, manipulan.” (p. 740)

<sup>47</sup> “Sí, ya sé; pero no puedo dar más detalles: de percibirlos, Colibrí no tuvo tiempo” (p. 742)

<sup>48</sup> “Pero, ¿dónde está el narrador de este infundio alpestre, de este atorante arroz con mango?/ Estoy – me mandaron con mi música a otra parte –,” (p. 745)

narrative is affected by him. In the end, Colibrí wins, Snow White becomes the queen, and the story is closed in a somewhat lopsided, yet extremely adorned ellipse.

## Conclusions

In the current work, neobaroque prose has been analysed with the help of poetic processes usually reserved for poetry. The poetic devices that can be found and can be connected to the overall poetic processes of the baroque. Furthermore, it is also evident that a poetics can exist without focusing on the ideological considerations represented by Alejo Carpentier and José Lezama Lima. A neobaroque prose poetics can be created by using universal tendencies of cosmology and poetics, instead of basing it on the Latin American *tellus*.

Taking into account the generalizations made in the first chapter, five poetic processes were extrapolated in the second chapter on the basis of the Cubans' texts – plutonism, tension, *horror vacui*, anamorphosis of the circle, and parody. All of these in turn can manifest in different poetic devices in a neobaroque text. These poetic processes are not unique to the neobaroque, yet the concentration and the self-referentiality of the poetic devices is notably different from other genres. Thus, plutonism in neobaroque texts is represented by amalgam images and portmanteaus; tension mostly in odd choices of vocabulary, unexpected combinations of adjectives and substantives, and mixing of registers; *horror vacui* in proliferating lists and metonymical constellations of symbols and epithets; anamorphosis of the circle in ellipsis, *retombées*, and using symbols instead of character names; and parody in intra- and intertext and in a high concentration of metafiction. The important point here is that the metafiction is not merely superficial, but motivates the whole structure of the novel.

Lastly, a reading of Severo Sarduy's novel *Colibrí* was presented on the basis of the suggested poetics, which confirmed that the poetics is indeed applicable, and suggested the following corrections and addendums that surfaced during the reading: plutonism in the novel is not represented by clear portmanteaus or amalgamations of images, instead Sarduy's strategy is to choose homonyms or homonym-like words, for example Cuban slang terms, which have acquired a different meaning from the one it has in general Spanish, unexpected derivations, for example the mixing of augmentatives and diminutives with opposite meanings; in addition to eccentric epithet and substantive

combinations tension can be found in the constant use of foreign vocabulary and logical contradictions; the anamorphosis of the circle in using adjectives autonomously; while *horror vacui* was expectedly represented by proliferating lists and symbol constellations. Under the process of parody the purposeful and unusual use of alliteration in high concentrations should be emphasized. In addition to that, the novel as a whole is a parody of the Latin American jungle novel genre.

*Colibrí* is a novel about how novels are written and read. It is a book about language, the possibilities of language and its inability of finite signification. Sarduy's principal aim was not to say something paramount about the philosophy of language or the world in general. He always wished that the neobaroque text be first and foremost a text without purpose, a *bliss text*, pure erotics, waste of words, text about text, text in order to be text. Yet, this kind of a text is, willingly or unwillingly, always a theoretic interpretation of text at the same time, as it comments on itself, a snake eating its own tail, a perfect fractal of itself. It can be sighed in a Sarduyan way - "How much effort without any functionality!", and add - "which results in a lot of functionality."

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# Kokkuvõte magistritööst “Neobarokse kujundi otsinguil”

Selle magistritöö eesmärk on kaardistada termini *neobarokk* võimalikke tähendusi ja rakendusi. Püütakse piiritleda neobarokse poeetika põhilisi poeetilisi protsesse, mille aluseks on kolm kuuba autorit ja nende vahel ilmnev fundamentaalne kontrast – Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima ja Severo Sarduy. Esimeses peatükis on esitatud nende autorite vaated barokile ja hoiakud selle suhtes.

Alejo Carpentier jõuab oma keskses essees *Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso* (Barokk ja imeline tõelus, 1975) seisukohale, et baroki näol on tegu universaalse vaimuga, nagu on olemas klassikaline vaim või imperiaalne vaim, mis on alati olemas olnud ning ilmnenu vaid paikades ning aegadel, mis seda kutsuvad. Näiteks Ladina-Ameerikas pärast konkistat. Carpentieri käsitluses on Ameerika, *mesitzaje*, hübriidsuse ja ülevoolava looduse maa, olnud alati barokne. See postkoloniaalne lähenemine on valitud, et vabastada Ameerika koloniaalajastu painest, iseseisvuda kunstiliselt, võita keskme hegemoonia. Selline lähenemine aga ei võimalda otsida spetsiifilist universaalset poeetikat.

José Lezama Lima tekstideski avaldub sarnane postkoloniaalne tendents, kuid erinevalt Carpentierist võtab Lezama Lima seisukoha, et barokk pärineb Euroopast ning leidis Ameerikas viljaka kasvupinnase. See põhineb Lezama Lima loodud maailma poeetilisel süsteemil (*sistema poético del mundo*), mis dikteerib, et maailma mõistmise aluseks on alati ja jäädavalt *kujund*, inimene võib vaid maailma interpreteerida, ja seda kujundlikult.

Kolmas kuuba autor, Severo Sarduy töötas enamiku oma elust Pariisis, kus osales Jacques Lacani kuulsates seminarides ning tegi teiste seas tihedat koostööd Roland Barthes'i, Julia Kristeva ja Philippe Sollers'iga. Sarduy, kes imetles terve elu Lezama Lima tööd ning pidas teda oma õpetajaks, võtab ta Lezama Lima põhimõtted ning arendab neid edasi poststrukturealistlikus vaimus, et luua universaalsem vaade barokile. Põhinedes Lacanil ning Barthes'il, saab neobaroki keskseks sisuks tähistamine ning selle võimalikkus.

Tähistamisahel illustreerib tähistamise põhimõttelist keerukust, kuna inimkeeles viitavad tähistajatele vaid teised tähistajad. Tähistatav on kättesaamatu ning libiseb alati tähistajate all minema. Tähendus asetseb tühjuses, mille ümber koonduvad tähistajad, mis üritavad jõuda tähistuseni, seda kunagi saavutamata. Seda võimetust ning selle tulemuseks olevat tähistajate kontrollimatut proliferatsiooni iseloomustab tekstinauding (*jouissance*), tunne, mis on sarnane valuga, mõnuga, orgasmiga, jne. Seda kirjeldab Roland Barthes teoses *Le plaisir du texte* (1973, e.k. Tekstimõnu 2007).

Võttes arvesse esimeses peatükis esitatud seisukohti, tuletatakse teises peatükis eelmainitud kolme kuubalase tekstide põhjal, mida on täpsustatud ning kritiseeritud teiste teoreetiliste allikate abil, viis poeetilist protsessi, mis iseloomustavad neobarokset teksti: plutonism, pinge, *horror vacui* (lit. hirm tühjuse ees), ringi anamorfoos ning paroodia. Need viis protsessi omakorda ilmnevad tekstides erinevate poeetiliste võtetena. Oluline on siinkohal tähendada, et meetodi aluseks on Tzvetan Todorovi meetod teoses *Poétique de la prose* (Proosapoeetika, 1971), milles eeldatakse, et poeetilised võtted ilmnevad kõikidel teksti tasanditel sõnast tervikuni ning peegeldavad üksteist. Seega ilmneb plutonism tekstides näiteks amalgaamkujundite ning sulandsõnadena; pinge peaaesjalikult kummalise sõnavaravalikuna, veidrate omadus- ja nimisõnade ühenditena, registrite segamisena; *horror vacui* ülevoolavate loeteludena, sümbolite ja epiteetide metonüümiliste konstellatsioonidena; ringi anamorfoos ellipsise, vastuolude, *retombée*'dena (kausaalsuse inversioonidena), karakternimede asemel sümbolite konstellatsioonide kasutamisenä; ning paroodia inter- ja intrateksti ning kõrge kontsentratsiooniga metafiktsioonina. Oluline siinjuures on see, et metafiktsioon ei ole vaid pinnapealne, vaid motiveerib terve teose ülesehituse, selle loogika.

Kolmandas peatükis loetakse selle visandatud poeetika alusel Severo Sarduy romaani *Colibrí* (1984), mille abil võib järelada, et poeetika on rakendatav, ning teha järgmised korrektiivid: plutonism romaanis ei esine selgesti leitavate sulandsõnadena, selle asemel on Sarduy strateegiaks homonüümide või homonüümi-sarnaste kujundite kasutamine, näiteks kuuba slängi sõnad, mis on omandanud peavoolu hispaania keelest erinevad tähendused, ootamatud tuletised, näiteks augmentatiivi ja deminutiivi segamine vastandtäheendusega sõnadega; pinge esineb lisaks kummalistele epiteetide ja nimisõnade

ühenditele (mida on tohutus kontsentratsioonis) veel tsitaatsõnade läbiva kasutamise ning loogiliste vastuoludena; ringi anamorfoos lisaks oodatutele ka omadussõnade iseseisva kasutamisena; samas kui *horror vacui* esines oodatult loetelude ja sümbolkonstellatsioonidena. Paroodia protsessi all tuleks välja tuua sihilik ning ebatavaline alliteratsiooni kontsentratsioon *Colibrí*'s ning asjaolu, et teose näol on tegu selge paroodiaga tervest Ladina-Ameerika džungliromaani žanrist.

*Colibrí* on romaan sellest, kuidas romaane kirjutatakse ja loetakse. Raamat keelest, keele võimalustest ning võimetusest lõplikult tähistada. Sarduy esmane eesmärk ei olnud kunagi öelda midagi suurt keelefilosoofia või maailma kohta. Ta soovis alati, et neobarokne tekst oleks eesmärgitu tekst, puhas erootika, pillamine, tekst tekstist, tekst iseenese pärast. Siiski on selline tekst tahes-tahtmata alati metafiktsionaalne tekst, kuna ta kommenteerib iseennast, madu, mis sööb oma saba, perfektne fraktaal iseeneses. Võib ohata sarduy'likult – „kui palju vaeva mitte millegi nimel“, ning lisada – „mis ütleb nii mõndagi“.

# Resumen de la tesis de maestría “En busca de la imagen neobarroca”

El objetivo de la presente investigación es delinear los posibles significados y aplicaciones del término *neobarroco*. He tratado de localizar los procesos principales de la poética neobarroca, basado en tres autores cubanos y la yuxtaposición fundamental que hay entre ellos – Alejo Carpentier, José Lezama Lima y Severo Sarduy. En el primer capítulo han sido presentadas sus opiniones y actitudes sobre el barroco.

Alejo Carpentier en su ensayo central *Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso* (1975) llega a la conclusión que el barroco representa un espíritu universal, como el espíritu clásico o imperial, que siempre ha existido y solo ha aparecido en lugares y tiempos que lo invitan. Por ejemplo en la América Latina después de la conquista. Para Carpentier América, la tierra de mestizaje, hibridización y naturaleza pletórica, siempre ha sido barroco. Este tipo de estrategia postcolonialista ha sido elegido para liberar las Américas de la carga de la era colonial, para emanciparse artísticamente, derrocar a la hegemonía del centro. Sin embargo, esta estrategia deja la busca de una poética universal innecesario.

Una tendencia postcolonialista similar aparece en los textos de José Lezama Lima, pero contrariamente a Carpentier, Lezama Lima adopta la posición que el barroco proviene de Europa y encontró tierra fecunda. Está basado en el *sistema poético del mundo*, que dicta que la base para entender el mundo es y siempre será la imagen, el ser humano solo puede interpretar el mundo figurativamente.

El tercer autor cubano, Severo Sarduy, trabajó en París la mayor parte de su vida, allí participaba en los famosos seminarios de Jacques Lacan y colaboraba con Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva y Philippe Sollers. Sarduy, admirador de Lezama Lima toda su vida, lo nombró como su mentor, tomando de él sus principios y desarrollándolos en un espíritu post-estructuralista, para crear una mirada más universal al barroco. Partiendo de las posiciones de Lacan y Barthes, el contenido central del neobarroco llega a ser la significación y su posibilidad. La cadena significante ilustra la fundamental dificultad

de significación, ya que en la lengua humana los significantes sólo refieren a otros significantes. El significado es inalcanzable y siempre desliza por debajo de los significantes. La significación se sitúa en un vacío, alrededor de que los significantes congregan que anhelan llegar al significado, sin nunca lograrlo. La incapacidad y su resultado, la incontrolada proliferación de significados, son caracterizados por el gozo textual (*jouissance*), un sentido parecido al dolor, delicia, orgasmo, etc. Esto se presenta en el libro de Roland Barthes, *Le plaisir du texte* (1973).

Teniendo en cuenta las actitudes presentadas en el primer capítulo, en el segundo capítulo cinco procesos poéticos están extrapolados en la base de los textos de los tres cubanos, para caracterizar el texto neobarroco: plutonismo, tensión, *horror vacui* (miedo del vacío), anamorfosis del círculo y parodia. Aquí es importante indicar que la base de la metodología es el método de Tzvetan Todorov en *La poética de prosa* (1971), donde presuponen que los recursos poéticos aparecen en todos los niveles del texto desde la palabra hasta el texto entero. Por consiguiente, el plutonismo en los textos se presenta en imágenes amalgamadas y palabras compuestas.; la tensión principalmente en vocabulario raro, compuestos extraños de adjetivos y sustantivos, en la mezcla de registros; *horror vacui* en listas proliferantes, constelaciones metonímicas de símbolos y epítetos; anamorfosis del círculo en elipsis, contradicciones, *retombées* (causalidad acrónica), en vez de nombres de caracteres constelaciones de símbolos han sido usados; y parodia en inter- e intratexto y metaficción de alta concentración. Es importante notar que la metaficción no es solo superficial sino motiva la estructura entera de la obra, su lógica.

En el tercer capítulo la novela de Severo Sarduy, *Colibrí* está leído a base de la poética esbozada. Se puede concluir que la poética es aplicable, y también hacer los siguientes correctivos: plutonismo en la novela no aparece en palabras compuestas fácilmente encontradas, en vez de esto, la estrategia de Sarduy es usar imágenes homónimas o cuasi-homónimas, por ejemplo el uso de la jerga cubana, donde las palabras han adquirido significados que diferencian de las que hay en español en general, derivados imprevistos, por ejemplo el uso del aumentativo y del diminutivo junto a significantes con alusiones opuestos; además de los compuestos extraños de epítetos y sustantivos (que presentan en una concentración inaudita), la tensión se puede encontrar en el constante uso de



palabras cita y en contradicciones lógicas; la anamorfosis del círculo, adicionalmente a las manifestaciones esperadas, en la independización de los adjetivos. *Horror vacui* se presentó esperadamente en listados y constelaciones de símbolos. Hace falta enfatizar que el proceso de parodia también se presentó en la deliberada y poco común concentración de aliteraciones en *Colibrí*. Aún más, la novela entera es una parodia clara del género latinoamericano de la novela de la selva.

*Colibrí* es una novela sobre cómo escribir y leer novelas. Una obra sobre lengua, las posibilidades de la lengua y su definitiva impotencia de significar. El objetivo de Sarduy nunca era decir algo grande sobre la filosofía de la lengua, o el mundo en general. Él siempre quería que el texto neobarroco fuera un texto sin objetivo, erótica pura, desperdicio, texto sobre texto, texto para ser texto. Sin embargo, un texto como este siempre resulta metaficcional, como se comenta, la culebra comiendo su rabo, un fractal perfecto en sí mismo. Se puede suspirar – “¡cuánto esfuerzo sin funcionalidad!”, y añadir – “y eso comunica mucho”.

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Tartus, **22.05.2017**